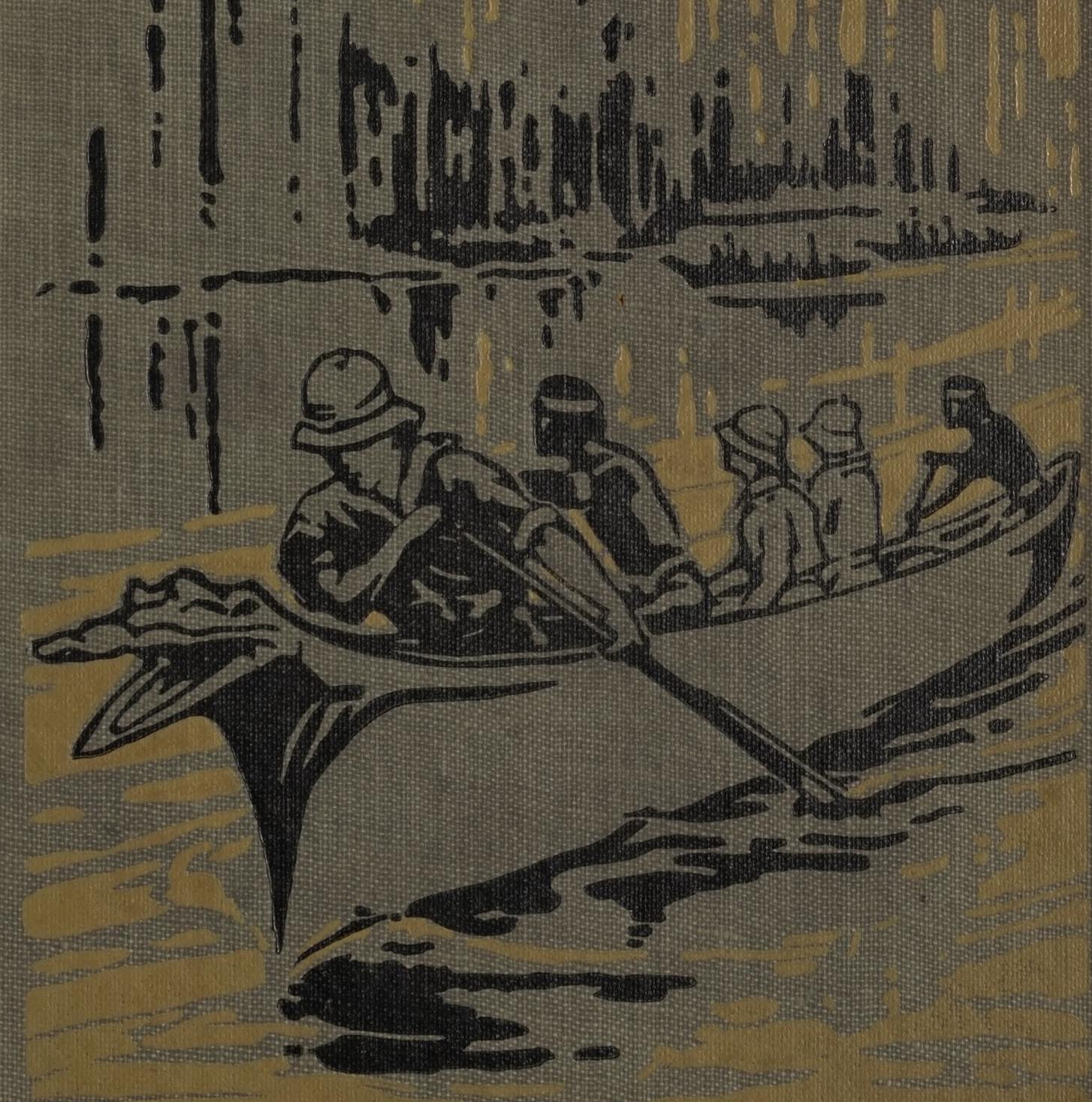


The Boy Explorers in Darkest New Guinea

WARREN H. MILLER





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THE BOY EXPLORERS IN
DARKEST NEW GUINEA





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ALL THE GENEROUS INSTINCTS OF YOUTH ROSE UP IN HIM AT THE SIGHT, AND WITHOUT THINKING FURTHER HE RAISED HIS PISTOL AND FIRED AT THE NEAREST PYGMY

THE BOY EXPLORERS SERIES

THE BOY EXPLORERS
IN
DARKEST NEW GUINEA

BY
WARREN H. MILLER
"

With Illustrations by
FRANK SPRADLING



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ALL THE GENEROUS INSTINCTS OF YOUTH ROSE UP
IN HIM AT THE SIGHT, AND WITHOUT THINKING
FURTHER HE RAISED HIS PISTOL AND FIRED
AT THE NEAREST PYGMY *Frontispiece*

THE WAY LED BACK THROUGH THE SAME TRAIL
THE NATIVES HAD COME UP ON, THE JUNGLE
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I

ARU

“LAND HO! fellows—yonder to the east.
Can you make it out?”

The two youths beside the tall man who had spoken shaded their eyes from the tropical glare and searched the cloud banks on the horizon of the blue Banda Sea.

“I think I see it, sir,” said Dwight. “Part of those clouds seem to have faint white lines in them.”

“I see it!” exclaimed Nicky, peering through his glasses. “It’s developing out like a camera plate—high, jungly mountains that seem to be floating in the clouds. I see dark spaces now, with streaks of sunlight edging the outlines of the hills. Hurrah for Aru!”

“That’s not Aru; that’s Ke’,” returned the

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man. "Aru is too low and flat to be seen yet. It lies to the east of Ke'. Our bungalow is on Kobror, the southernmost of the Aru Islands; we ought to pass the port of Dobbo in a few hours."

The three white men were standing before a small palm-thatched deckhouse which was their home on the Malay proa *Kuching*. Curator Baldwin of the National Museum was their leader. He was a tall, rangy giant of a man, his sinewy frame clad in tropical khaki, with the inevitable puttees of the East accentuating the muscular leanness of his long legs. One placed him easily—mining engineer or leader of a scientific field party, captain of his team in college days, most likely, that commanding sort of man to whom exploration in dangerous out-of-the-way places is all in the day's work.

And the choleric blue eyes that looked a man in the eye from under his pith helmet, the surburnt face with its gray mustache and firm chin, warned the casual stranger that here was the last man in the world to trifle with.

The two youths beside him were scarcely less noteworthy. Their resolute, weather-tanned young faces bespoke the hardy out-

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doormen, of the same breed, but younger, as the curator. Dwight was tall and spare, with a keen hatchet face and merry gray-green eyes that twinkled at one when he talked, yet they could grow hard and cold as ice in time of peril. Nicky was stout; habitually good-humored, habitually chuckling over the least joke, and always finding one and making himself the butt of it on every occasion. They were a great team; always "joshing" each other, always differing on every conceivable subject, yet devoted to each other and to the curator, whom they adored as an athlete and admired as a scientist. For two years they had been his assistants on expeditions in Africa and in British Guiana. He had picked them for this trip because of their tried and proven resourcefulness in facing conditions as they found them in wild lands. As unlike, physically, as two boys could be, they were alike in one thing—their sturdy independence of character. Original in everything they did, they copied no one, neither in their outdoor equipment nor in their ways of living when in the jungle.

The Malay proa on which the party was sailing bore the house flag of the museum floating from the end of her seventy-foot fore-

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yard. In these days of interisland steamers you will not see so many of her type, once the most common craft of the Banda Sea. Her sails were huge mats of palm fiber; her masts tripods of bamboo; and her body, built on Ke' by the greatest boat builders of the Malay Archipelago, was of hewn logs, doweled together along their edges and secured by ribs of teak bent in and lashed with rattan to projections on her planks. There was not an iron nail or a spike in her anywhere, but the curator had chartered her for the museum's field expeditions among the islands as the best ship for the purpose, for her crew of Javanese and Bugis cost but their rations of rice and fish, with a small wage, and she could sail anywhere and be repaired at any island with native palm and rattan.

Over the smooth rollers of the Banda Sea she bowled southward on the east monsoon, steadily rising the low hills of Aru to the east. By midafternoon she had come off Dobbo, the principal pearl port of the Aru Islands, and the captain altered her course slightly, heading for the coast of Kobror, the wildest of the two great mainlands of Aru.

Out of the coral reefs that surround the harbor of Dobbo put forth a long, black canoe.

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Her crew of naked blacks foamed up the water in spats of spray with their paddles, singing and shouting as they came. Up in her high carved prow sat a white man, dressed in the cottons of the equatorial tropics, with a Japanese-bowl hat sheltering his head from the sun. He rose and waved them a greeting as his canoe drew near.

"Proa ahoy! I say, are you there, Baldwin?" he shouted. "I'm going on to Kobror with you."

"Hello, Bentham! That's fine, old man! Come right aboard and we'll have tiffin. . . . Did you get my letter? These mail steamers only touch Aru about once in a dog's age, they tell me. How are you, old new-chum?" greeted the curator, grasping Bentham's hand as the canoe shot alongside and her crew of mop-haired Papuans leaped aboard to mingle with their own crew.

"How am I, dea-rr man? My word! Rippin'! Yes, I got your letter, doncherknow. Have a bungalow for you; I fancy it's more or less done in, but it's out in the jungle, as you wanted," he replied, shaking hands heartily.

"It was mighty good of you, Bentham!" thanked the curator. "We'll fix it up and make it our headquarters while down here.

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We're stopping on Kobror a day or so after paradise birds."

He turned to introduce Dwight and Nicky, who had been studying Bentham curiously. The bold, independent swagger of the Australian was written in every line of his sun-burnt face. He was the representative of the Aru pearl company, the curator had told them, sole white man in a whole group of islands peopled by native black savages.

They led the pearl trader to their house on deck, where the Javanese cook served tiffin. It was a cozy little retreat, about ten feet square by perhaps six high, and was built of bamboo arches thatched with palm-leaf attap. Its floor was raised some six inches above the wet deck by springy bamboo poles laid side by side, and the thatch walls were lined with fragrant sandalwood boxes, which also served for bunks.

Bentham was pathetically glad to see them, eager to talk and talk of the war and the world's doings, with all the pensive loneliness of a white man condemned to months and months of existence with no other associates than Papuan natives and Chinese traders. The curator and the boys filled him up with news to his heart's content. Just to hear

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their voices in the good old mother tongue once more, to feel their keen minds sympathetic with his own, was pleasure enough, and Bentham basked luxuriantly in it.

“Where to next, after Kobror, Baldwin?” he asked, after a pause in the flow of news,

“Dutch New Guinea,” puffed the curator. “That’s our main drive this time. Our proa sails for there in a day or so.”

“Dutch New Guinea!” The trader’s face grew suddenly grave. “My word, man! Have you read Captain Rawling’s report of the British expedition up the Mimika? Or about the Dutchman, Lorentz’s, dash to peak Wilhelmina in the Snow Mountains? He’s the only one who has got to them, so far.”

“Sure! We’re familiar with all that. But I can say this to you, Bentham, you being an Australian: the trouble with the British, and with the Dutch, too, is that they can’t get away from the *safari* idea. Get me? Every one of their expeditions failed because of it. Your Englishman must have his tub and his champagne, his big tents and heavy camp furniture, his tinned sweetmeats and what not, and it takes an army of porters to carry it all. He learned the *safari* idea in

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Africa; but it won't work in New Guinea, because you can neither move a *safari* through the jungle nor live off the country with it. The British were a year and a half on the Mimika, and they never got within forty miles of the Snow Mountains. It took them five weeks to cut a *safari* trail three miles long. All that country, from the Great Precipice to the sea, is a flat, dense jungle, with the rivers running through it so swiftly that they are impossible to ascend. They contented themselves with plane-table surveys made from a clearing in the jungle, and before long their army of porters died like flies of beriberi.

"We are going to try the American idea," he continued, "going light"—'pigging it,' the British call it—but it gets you somewhere. We'll take our own light, concentrated foods along, and live off the country on wallabys and wild pig for fresh meat. There'll be plenty for us."

"But, man dea-rr—the danger!" objected Bentham. "These Aru niggers, here, had the fear of God dynamited into them some forty years ago, and they'll jolly well never touch a white man again! But it's different in Dutch New Guinea. They're can-

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nibals and head hunters, and most of them have never even seen a white man. The English territory is somewhat policed, but, my word! the Dutch have only two small posts six hundred miles apart on the whole west coast! You've heard of the Tugeri head hunters? Many a time our soldiers have chased them over the border—where they stay, to raid us again whenever they feel like it—as jolly a bunch of cannibals as ever cut a throat. And the pygmies of the mountains! My word! Your little party would be massacred the first step ashore. What could you do against fifty of them, or a hundred?"

"Oh—we'll manage!" twinkled the curator, mysteriously.

"Man dea-rr, it's foolhardiness! Here, let me give you some dynamite sticks, anyway. It's plain suicide to go ashore without it. Our expedition, with its army of porters, was all right—but you!"

"Say, Bentham, there's been a war, you know!" laughed the curator, "and I was in it—lieutenant of a trench-bombing detail. Dynamite is old stuff, now. I've brought a few grenades along, if we have any trouble."

"You'll need 'em for those blighters!"

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exclaimed Bentham. "So you were in France, eh?" The regret in his own tones told how keenly it galled him to have been stuck down here out of it all. The talk went back to the war again, of which he could never get enough.

"Yes, we're going to try a new tack in a new way," said the curator, when they got back to the expedition again. "We're going to land in that long lagoon at the head of Dorgo Bay. No white men have ever been in that way. The mountains come right close to shore there, and we can get on high ground right off and avoid that swampy jungle. Then, southward along the ridges above the Great Precipice for ours, and we'll see what we'll see."

"Well!" said Bentham, shaking his head, "good luck to you! But the pygmies or the Outanatas will get you sure! You'll have to wade through dynamite the whole way!"

"Oh, we're not exactly unprepared, you know," demurred the curator. He showed him a curious pistol that the boys had often speculated over. It looked like a foreign automatic, only its barrel was a mere shell of steel, like a shotgun, and it had no hammer or firing mechanism.

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"I had this made. Sort of shell thrower, you know. It's rather effective at moderate ranges—shoots T. N. T. shells. It pays to look ahead in these expeditions and try to meet conditions as you imagine them likely to turn out. Force, and plenty of it, is the only thing the savage really understands, so we're fixed to defend ourselves if we have to."

Bentham looked relieved. "But suppose you get captured and tied up?" he questioned. "Those beggars will eat you, sure—like you all the better if you are white."

"I've been tied up before. Mundurucus, up the Orinoco. But I didn't stay tied long."

He twirled a ring on his right hand with his thumb as the others looked at him questioningly.

"Picked this up from an old *guru* up in the Himalayas. Came out of some Indian palace, most likely. I bet it's got a history!" He pressed the monogram of the ring with his thumb tip as they watched. It was all done with one hand, but out of its base a tiny, two-edged steel knife stuck up from the base of the monogram. "You twist your wrist, with that ring knife inside, you see, and you'd be surprised to see how easy it is

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to cut a thong around your wrists with it," he exclaimed.

Shouts on deck interrupted the boys' exclamations of astonishment and brought them running out of the cabin. The mainland of Kobror lay off not a mile to windward. The crew were tacking ship, and all was shouting and confusion.

"I guess we'd better get our outfits ready, boys," said the curator. "Call Sadok and Baderoon, so we can muster the party and see that they have everything."

Presently Dwight returned, followed by Sadok and Baderoon. The former was a hill Dyak, the "star" bird hunter of their party. He came up, completely armed, with his long sumpitan, or blowgun, of Borneo in hand, and on his left arm was a conical shield of bamboo. A steel parang-ihlang hung at his belt, and over his shoulder was suspended the bamboo quiver of darts for the blowgun. His muscular brown arms and shoulders glistened in the sunlight which glinted on the gold and silver threads of his gorgeous chawat and the dull jewels that studded his jacket.

"What have you got for a sleeping rig in the jungle, Sadok?" inquired the curator as the Dyak stood waiting inspection.

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Sadok turned him around, exposing the tightly rolled cadjan, or native mat, hung on his back. Unrolled, it would be about four feet square, and it was house, blanket, mattress, and umbrella in one to him, for one corner of it was sewed into a pocket, so that he could wear the thing over his head when it rained.

"You'll do, Sadok. Mr. Bentham, here, will assign you some black boys to carry up our stuff when we land. You'll take charge of them."

"A'right, Orang-kaya!" grinned Sadok, and went forward among the crew again.

"Baderoon next!" called the curator. "What you-fellah got to take 'long beach?"

Baderoon burst into boisterous Papuan merriment and did a handspring on deck. All he owned in the world was the long bow in his hand and a string about his middle, with a quiver of arrows dangling from it. His dress hardly needed taking off at night. There was a brass ring around one arm, with some tufts of human hair ornamenting it, whose owner had been eaten long ago—details obscure if you asked Baderoon!—and there was a three-pronged comb stuck into the long frizzles of his mop of hair.

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Then, he wore a small tin mirror hanging by a string from his nose, and when Baderoon had put on that prized possession he had said the last word in dandyism!

“Here, Baderoon-fellah, catch’m blanket!” said the curator, tossing him a spare one. “And mind you don’t wear it about your neck, the way the Wanderobos did when the English forbade them to come into town without a blanket to cover their nakedness!”

Baderoon exploded in a gust of merriment and tied the blanket decorously about his waist. At a sign of dismissal he went forward to rejoin Sadok. The proa was now tacking in through the coral reefs. A fleet of black canoes came out from the village on shore to meet her. The paddlers scrambled aboard and immediately surrounded the white men, pointing and gesticulating with unslaked Papuan curiosity. Their long noses hooked at them like parrots’ beaks as they cackled boisterously, fingering freely and unabashed the clothing and equipment of the whites.

In a final reach the proa ran hard aground on the white sand beach, and everyone prepared to jump ashore over her bow.

“So long, for the present, Baldwin,” said Bentham, shaking hands. “I’ve got some

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pearl business to attend to here with the chief, and I sha'n't see you again. These rotters will carry up your luggage as your man directs. Send for me if you need anything."

He nodded cordially and was off into the village of Wamba, which straggled along the shore under lines of coco palms. They landed and went up its one street, followed by a long line of black porters, each with a single article balanced on his head. The veranda of their bungalow peeped out of the jungle on a low hillside at the end of the street. Bamboos hovered over it thickly, their nodding willow-leaved foliage almost hiding its thatched roof from view. Here all their outfit was set down and the curator began settling like an old campaigner.

The boys sat out on the veranda, looking down on the main street of Wamba with the keenest interest. The tall peaked gables of the thatch houses lined both sides of the sandy road. Each house was made of long bamboo poles, laid up A-shaped like a wedge tent and lashed with rattan at their tops. Every foot of the street seemed covered with busy people, for everybody's business was being transacted out in the main road, in

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everyone's way. There were mop-headed Papuan natives, strolling around with bundles of sugar cane over their shoulders; Javanese sailors in their conical straw hats, buying parrots from turbaned Mohammedan Bugis; Chinese merchants buying sago bread from more naked natives, who carried it by a yoke and two slings like a pair of Dutch pails; more Javanese, repairing a proa plank with native adzes; and a constant stream of Aru hunters and fishermen, coming in with fowl, trepang, mother-of-pearl shells, birds, and coconut shells in baskets. For domestic pets there were pigs, kangaroos, goats, tame bobos (pelicans), and parrots everywhere, wandering at will about the street or swinging from a perch under the thatch porches.

Then a native hunter came wandering by, with a spotted cuscus, or native opossum, hanging by its tail, and him the curator snared, to buy the specimen from him and engage the man for a guide to the *blakang-tana*, the jungle hinterland, next day.

Tiring of the noisy scene at length, Dwight went inside and lay down on a cool rattan lounge, leaving Nicky to help sort collection boxes with the curator. After reading

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awhile, he lay down the book with a sigh of content and looked idly up into the thatch that was thickly woven through the poles of their roof. Indolently gazing, he noticed a dark mass overhead, seemingly buried in the thatch. Examining it more carefully, he could see yellow and black marks, and concluded that it must be a tortoise shell that some one had left there. But the thing still fascinated him, and every little while he would look up at it again, while the others went on with the business of settling the house. Then a slight rustle in the thatch attracted him, and, gazing up at it steadily again, it suddenly resolved itself into a large snake, compactly coiled up in a kind of knot! Dwight's jaw dropped as he detected the head and its bright eyes in the very center of the folds.

"Good Lord, fellows!" he called out, jumping to his feet, "here's a boa constrictor, a python!—up in our roof!"

The curator jumped up the steps of the veranda in a bound. "Where! Show me him!" he demanded.

"Right up there!" laughed Dwight, quivering with excitement. "And making himself at home just as nice as nice!"

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Sadok started to draw his parang, but the curator stopped him.

"Wait!" he commanded. "We don't want to spoil his skin."

Baderoon came running in. "Me kill'm! Me catch'm tailie! Me kill plenty snake on Bouru!" he yelled, begging the curator for permission to show them.

The latter smiled quietly. "Clear out, boys—and watch the fun!" he said, picking up the lamp off the table and sweeping a lot of small things out of the way. "Ever see a native kill a python? I guess the house will stand it! Go get'm Baderoon-fellah!"

Baderoon jumped for the rafters, and there was a violent commotion in the thatch as he dropped down with the tip of the boa's tail in both hands. He and Sadok tugged away at it, soon ripping down about ten feet of the writhing coils, while the others ran laughing for the door. The commotion inside increased, and then there was a heavy thump and the crash of chairs and tables upset and flying about, and then Baderoon emerged, running down the steps with about thirty feet of snake behind him, twisting and lashing with its thick coils. The python swept everything with him and made a last

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stand with its neck hooked about a veranda post, while the boys yelled and catcalled with glee. Then Baderoon tore him loose and, running fast, flew with him toward the jungle, where, stopping suddenly, he snapped the snake's long body like a whip-lash and smashed his head against a tree.

"Whee!" yelled Nicky, delightedly, from the veranda. "Me for the next one! Gee! I'd like to try that stunt!"

But the python was not nearly dead yet, and he started to squirm off into the cane. Baderoon was on him like a flash, and, grabbing the tail, he snapped him against the tree again. Nicky, prancing down from the veranda, dashed in and fumbled at the writhing coils, to try it himself; but with a quick twist the powerful tail fastened itself around his ankle, and a huge, thick loop of the snake rose and curled itself tight around his waist. The boy gasped, crushed breathless, and it looked serious for a time as Dwight and the curator rushed down to the rescue, but suddenly there was a bright flash of steel, and Sadok's parang met the next loop coming down over the boy's head and clove it nearly in two.

"Me sorry, Orang-kaya," said Sadok, as

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the snake collapsed and Nicky squirmed free of the aimless coils. "Me spoil'm specimen?"

"You did just right, Sadok!" said the curator, heartily. "He could have crushed Nicky to death, even in his last throes—"

"Him plenty debbil-debbil!" interrupted Baderoon, coming up from freeing Nicky. "White boy nebber, *nebber* let snake-fellah catch'm first! Mus' run with him-a tailie—fast!" he explained, earnestly.

"Well," said the curator, after the Fat One had been guyed to everybody's satisfaction, "le's go in for a look-see. Perhaps some more interesting creatures are camping out in our bungalow!"

They explored every nook and cranny of the hut, dislodging a few kangaroo mice, which were captured and added to the collections after hilarious chases, but no larger visitors were found, and no poisonous snakes, rare throughout the archipelago, were discovered. The curator set the lamp on a table out on the veranda, after supper, and they sat around it, collecting the rare moths and beetles attracted by its light. As a nightcap, the brilliant and wonderful clear-winged moth came fluttering in, and the curator snatched at it avidly with his net.

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“*Coccytia d'urviller!*” he gasped, taking the gorgeous prize from the net. “Boys, we are in luck! There are not five of these in all the museums of America! I guess that will be about all for to-night!”

The party turned in, and long before dawn were awakened by the native hunter at the veranda steps. Gulpng some hot coffee and downing a rasher of bacon and eggs, they slung on their knapsacks, grabbed their guns, and followed him to the boat for a trip to the mainland in the mighty jungles of Aru, where dwelt the great bird of paradise.

II

INTO THE JUNGLE

THE jungle of the mainland of Aru came down to the very water's edge. A narrow strip of sandy beach, lined with nodding palms, was strewn with fallen trees, bare and sun dried, and whole colonies of hermit crabs on the beach told of the teeming life of tropical nature pushed to the very verge of the sea. Their party landed from the village key of old coral growth, and stepped ashore at the end of a native path that was a mere tunnel through the undergrowth. Never had they seen palms in such profusion or so tall and magnificent, the bare trunks rising through lesser growths a hundred feet high, where the great fronds of leaves spread green umbrellas far overhead. The tree ferns, their first in this Papuan land, rose feathery and beautiful, with stems thirty feet high, above which shot up the lacy fronds, giant replicas of our northern hot-house varieties. The ubiquitous banana was

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everywhere, growing wild in the forest, generally in the open glades of pandanus palms, whose scraggly trees twisted high in the misty air, with spikes of leaves like century plants at their branch tips. And every now and then, through the dim vistas of vine and creeper, they could note a dense thicket where a giant fig tree grew, surrounded by its own forest of aerial root shoots a hundred feet in diameter.

Down on the jungle floor scuttled millions of silent hermit crabs, or great orange-and-red land crabs popped down their holes. One had but to look an instant to realize that the jungle was alive with lizards, black, green, and gray, all motionless on limb or root, staring at the explorers with bright beady eyes—to flash into a green streak of movement at the first motion to catch them.

It was early, with the faint light of dawn hardly penetrating the green depths all about them as they went silently along in single file, listening to the chorus of bird life in the tree tops. The shrill scream of lorries and parakeets, the hoarse cry of the tree pigeons, and the incessant chirrup of smaller birds awoke the jungle with the voices of the bird world. Then the sun shot up in

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a flaming fire into the pale tropical heavens, and its rays lit up the glades, showing huge yellow-and-black spiders on thick ropy webs swung in every open spot, and gorgeous butterflies in metallic blues and greens sailing through the sunlit vistas, causing many a stop and chase.

A cry rang startlingly through the tree tops. "Wawk! Wawk! Wawk!—Wok, wok wok!" it said, remarkably like the caw of our northern crow.

The curator stopped and listened, his hand to ear to locate the direction of the sound. "The great bird of paradise, boys!" he exclaimed, exultingly.

"Why, it sounds exactly like a crow flying through our home woods!" cried Dwight.

"Sure! It's the tropical crow. They all belong to the crow family, only this is what Nature can do with the crow when you give her plenty of heat and sunlight!" retorted the curator. "There he goes again, off to the left!"

"Him go-stop sacaléli tree," put in Sadok, who had been listening, fumbling at the cover of his dart quiver.

"Yes? The sacaléli, the plumage dance," agreed the curator. "They meet in some

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large tree, where the males dance and show off their plumes before the females. Baderoon, ask'm hunter-fellah if we go catch'm sacaléli tree, all right," he said, turning to the negro.

There were a few grunts between the Papuan and the Aru hunter, who nodded stolidly and led on. The party quickened their pace as the path led upward through the hills. Then Sadok stopped and raised his long ironwood sumpitan. It poised for an instant, pointing up into a wide-branched bamboo clump, and, before their eyes could pick out the mark, came the soft plop! of the dart as it left the sumpitan like a streak of light. Followed the fall of a reddish bird, tumbling down through the leaves, and Baderoon dashed into the thicket to retrieve it. He brought back a jewel of fluttering fire in his hands. Of an intense metallic red, its throat was of deep orange, and from under the wings jutted out two little fronds of gray aigrettes tipped with broad bands of lustrous metallic green.

"The king bird of paradise!" cried the curator, holding the feathered beauty in his hands and examining it admiringly. "Great business, Sadok! What a wonderful bird!"

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"Rare, too, isn't it?" asked Dwight.

"You're dead right it is! We'll be lucky if we get two of them this expedition!" said the curator.

Just then Nicky, who had come back from a foray with his hands full of lizards and crabs, had a flash of inspiration. "Put him on a twig, quick!" he yelled. "I'll get a colored photo of him!"

"Good idea, kid!" smiled the curator. "That will be something new."

The bird was alive yet, only partly paralyzed by the poison, and his eyes were bright and open, and the little tufts on his breast still erect. He sat quietly on a twig in the sunlight, while Nicky set up a folding steel tripod and took three color plates as fast as he could change holders.

"That 'll be about worth the whole trip to me!" he cried. "Wait till the director of the Museum sees that print, eh, Mr. Baldwin?" he chuckled.

The curator grinned indulgently. He loved Nick's intense enthusiasms, particularly when they led to something of scientific value. Sadok wrapped the prize carefully in a cone of pandanus leaf and they started out again. After about an hour's

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travel they came to a high plateau where the creepers and hanging vines were less abundant and one could see for some distance under the forest floor. A grove of tall tree trunks loomed up ahead, with bare, scant-leaved branches. Each had a sort of leaf hut, built far up in the fork.

They skirted the grove, silently, the curator explaining how the native hunters secured paradise birds by lying in wait for them under the hut, aiming with a blunt-headed arrow at the males during the dance. Their own hunter paid no attention to the grove, but led on for a mile farther across the plateau. Then he stopped and pointed up into the trees. Here was a similar grove, but much smaller, and buried far deeper in the jungle. Evidently it was his own secret hunting ground. Grunting a few words to Baderoon, he undid the belt of woven fiber about his waist and made a loop of it around the tree. Then, alternately walking up it and shifting the belt, he ascended the bare trunk to the leaf screen built in its fork, and disappeared.

“Him stop, go-shoot’m goby-goby,” explained Baderoon in a stage whisper. “We-fellah go-hide and catch’m spec’men when he drop.”

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They all sought hiding places in the under-brush and waited. After a time came a distant, "Wawk! Wawk! Wawk!" answered by another bird farther off in the jungle, and then by still another. Like a flock of crows calling to the assembly, the boys could hear the paradise birds gathering. Then, like a flash of shimmering light, a great golden bird, eighteen inches long, came dropping down from over the tree tops. He lit in the tree farthest off from the hunter's, preened himself awhile, and then lifted up his voice in the call of his kind. An answering cry heralded the approach of another one, and soon he too dropped down and joined the other.

"That's bad—they're gathering in the wrong tree," whispered Nicky to Dwight, who lay by his side.

"Wait," cautioned his chum. "We can shoot and get a few, if worse comes to worst. I'd far rather get a nest or an egg. There's not one in any museum in the world, the curator tells me. Look—there's a female!"

Nicky looked up to see a dull, coffee-colored bird perch down quietly on a near-by branch. The two males at once began to ruffle and preen their long golden plumes.

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Peering through his glasses, Dwight could even see the pale-blue beak, the delicate straw yellow of head and neck, and the rich, scaly feathers of metallic emerald green on the throat. From under the wings came the long two-foot plumes of intense glossy orange-brown color, and they ruffled and spread in the breeze as the male bird shook them for the admiration of the female. A glorified crow, a crow raised to the most unimaginable hues of bottled sunlight and all the vivid splendor of the tropics, was the great bird of paradise! As Dwight looked, he began to dance, hopping up and down on the limb, each motion spreading the glorious plumes and letting them fall like down. His rival was dancing also, and three more males and another female joined them.

Dwight crawled over to the curator, who was watching the whole performance avidly through his glasses.

“Our native hunter’s out of luck, sir!” he muttered. “He’ll never be able to hit them from his tree, and if he misses one the whole flock will fly off. What’ll we do—shoot?”

“Presently,” whispered the curator. “Go

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get Nicky, and we'll each pick a bird and fire. They may fly over to the hunter's tree yet, but I can see that they're all as suspicious as our own crows. The tree they are in seems to suit them all right."

Another male flew in as he spoke, and the whole tree top was filled with hopping, flashing flames of golden color, a sight in itself that was worth traveling many miles to see. Dwight soon returned, with Nicky crawling behind him, and the three lay and watched the birds, far overhead.

"Well, boys, I guess we'd better fire," said the curator, at length. "That native may try to shoot from his tree and spoil the whole thing. Dwight, you pick a female, and Nicky and I will each get one of the males, and then we'll do what we can with the other barrel."

They raised their guns and were about to shoot, when one of the male birds silently loosed his hold and came tumbling down!

"Wait! Sadok!" whispered the curator, restraining them energetically. "I'd quite forgotten about him and his sumpitan!" Another bird fell. Somewhere, deep in the jungle, that silent, deadly blowgun in Sadok's hands was bringing them down. At long

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intervals two more birds fell, and then there was a slight *tock!* in the branches and they could see through the glasses the short dart sticking in the bark. The other birds raised alarmed cries at it and prepared to fly.

“Now!” cried the curator. “Get a couple of females!” The guns barked as the startled birds took wing, while two dull-colored hen birds and another male came tumbling down. Then they all rushed over to pick up the specimens.

The native hunter came dropping hurriedly down out of his tree, gave them one wild look of terror, and bolted incontinently into the forest, shrieking an unintelligible gibberish as he ran. Baderoon burst into a yell of laughter and tumbled on the ground with merriment.

“Now *what* in the dickens ails *him?*” grinned the curator, looking after the flying native from the bird in his hand. “Call him back, Baderoon.”

“Taboo! *Yow-yowri!* Bewitched! Debbil-debbil!” gasped Baderoon from the ground. “Him see plenty debbil-debbil! Bird, he go-dead—no see um arrow, no hear gun! Him no come back!” he cackled, squirming in an agony of mirth.

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"Get up, fool! Go catch'm!" ordered the curator, sternly, kicking the helpless negro to his feet. Baderoon ran off, still howling with delight.

"He'll never catch that coon in ten thousand years!" chuckled Nicky. "Sadok's blowgun scared all the hair off his head. But—how are we going to get out of the jungle without him, though?"

"We'll camp right here," declared the curator. "It's always home wherever we are, and there's lots to do."

"All right, and, as I have no camp to make, I'm going to find a nest or an egg if it takes all day!" declared Nicky. "I haven't really begun to study this jungle yet, you know!"

"Not a bad idea," agreed the curator, heartily. "Take Sadok along with you, so that you'll turn up sometime," he laughed. "Dwight and I will make camp and skin out the birds."

The grove was an excellent one to camp in, clear and open under the great trees, and Dwight started his camp at once. Their system was an original and elastic one, each man for himself, each one eating or sleeping when and where he pleased. They had

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long ago discarded the old-fashioned camp where one man cooked for the crowd and all had to be in at mealtimes. Such a system was too rigid and conventional for such diverse tastes and occupations as these three.

Dwight opened his pack and unlimbered his steel pickax, driving down into the lava rock with its point to make holes for tent pegs and clear out rocks on his sleeping site. He chose a spot covered with small bushes like huckleberries, filled with a windfall of dried leaves. Here he spread out his sleeping bag, and over it went a light tent fly, on a rope stretched over two forked stakes. From the rope he hung a mosquito screen, with a small ring of cane cut in the jungle and bent into a hoop a foot in diameter, so as to hold the net gauze clear of his face. This hoop was tied inside the square of net about a foot below the central peak from which it hung, and the folds of the net draped over the head of the bag. Dwight's sleeping bag was waterproof and insectproof, so that, with the net hung over his face and the fly over that, forming a sun and rain shade, he was well protected from insects and wet weather on very little weight—about five pounds all told for tent and bedding.

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In front of his camp the lad built a small stone fireplace, with a row of his little food sacks hung handy around it on cross poles. He set about making a batter of flour, corn meal, dried egg powder, dried milk, and baking powder, and soon had cooked himself a pile of flapjacks. With the body of a paradise bird grilling on a forked stick, and a tin of tea steeping on the hearth, he was as well fed and comfortable as anywhere else in the world. After lunch he seized his pickax and went collecting for insects and beetles in the forest, the sharp pick point digging and prying into the bark of prone trees, where many a new form of jewel-bodied tropical beetle came to his collection box.

The curator had silently melted into the jungle, whence soon appeared the brown glint of sunlight from the tent fly spread over his hammock. A great bag of netting enveloped the latter, and it could be drawn in tight by a string after he had gotten inside. A handful of rockahominy washed down with a drink from his canteen and a bite of grilled bird satisfied him for lunch. After skinning out the paradise birds and hanging them in a row from a line stretched

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between two trees to keep them from the ants, he disappeared into the jungle on his favorite occupation of studying bird life.

Dwight found a bewildering world of new entomology awaiting him. His pickax, net, and magnifying glass were busy every moment, and the boy quivered with excitement, rushing hither and yon through the jungle, now after a leaf-winged butterfly, which would disappear with maddening legerdemain; now stooping to watch a fight between two male *Brenthidæ*, long armored beetles with fighting jaws at the end of a slender proboscis like a spear; now urged to frantic pursuit of the rare horned deer fly. The mystery of the leaf-winged butterfly was solved when he had examined a bush on which it lit more closely. One of the leaves turned out to be the creature itself, with wings folded, motionless on the stem, the under surface of its wings so closely resembling the leaves that only the closest scrutiny could detect the difference.

By late afternoon he returned to camp by compass, his box full of new and wonderful insects.

“Look at the day’s plunder, Mr. Baldwin!” cried the youth, enthusiastically. He

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drew out the cork slabs from his carrying tin, covered with the heterogenous collection impaled on pins.

"These horned flies are a real find!" exclaimed the curator, interestedly, after examining the butterflies and beetles. "They go to prove a great scientific fact—first propounded as a theory by Mr. Wallace, the English naturalist—that Aru was once part of New Guinea. Those little flies can be explained in no other way. Common in New Guinea, it would be impossible for them to travel the hundred and fifty miles from the New Guinea coast to Aru. Tomorrow, if Nicky does not come back, we'll go on a trip to see another curious phenomenon, the salt-water channels that divide the islands of Aru. They are true rivers, yet have no flow other than the tide at their mouths. How do you explain that, Dwight?"

The boy confessed that he could not. "Come to think of it, sir, these are the only islands in the world that *have* such channels," he cried out over the novelty of it.

As Nicky did not put in an appearance that night, they set out next morning northward, leaving Baderoon to skin out birds in camp. The curator did not worry over

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Nicky. In his rucksack the lad had carried his odd nightgear, of an old bathing suit with the armholes sewed up to pull over his head, a pair of extra socks to cover his arms and another for his feet. So dressing up to go to bed, Nicky would turn in on a leaf patch, secure from insects and snakes, and, with Sadok to guide him, would be abundantly able to care for himself.

After several hours' travel to the north the going became more rocky and the vegetation sparse and thorny. Soon open skyline appeared ahead, and then they came upon the rocky cliffs of basic limestone that border the south bank of the river Majkor, which separates the Aru mainlands of Maykor and Kobror. The north bank was high jungle, and up and down its reaches it was a true river, a deep, narrow channel winding through the jungle as far as the eye could reach. Yet its waters were salt.

"That's really wonderful, sir!" cried Dwight, enthusiastically, when he had grasped the full significance of it. "Lots of small islands like England, for instance, have rivers; but they are true rivers, rising in the mountains somewhere. Others have salt straits dividing them from the main-

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land, like Staten Island, at home. This channel can't be a fissure, for it winds and turns just like a river. What is Wallace's theory, Mr. Baldwin?" he asked, giving it up.

"The true one, I think," replied the curator. "The west coast of Aru is deep water; the east, a shallow pearl sea, clear over to New Guinea. That sea was undoubtedly formed by gradual subsidence of the sea bottom. It is only three hundred feet deep; so that would not take long for geology to accomplish. The coast of New Jersey is rising two feet a century. At no very distant date, then, New Guinea and Aru were one big continent, with all the sea between lowlands—very like those that extend now back from the coast to the Great Precipice over where we are soon going. The rivers, then, like the Outanata and the Mimika, must have flowed through those lowlands, and these channels of Aru were part of them, emptying into the sea on the west coast of Aru. Can't you see how important this little trip of ours is, now? This river can tell us something of the mineralogy of the unexplored interior of New Guinea! And without our ever going there, for that matter!"

"Sure it can—if we had a long line and a

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grappling hook to dredge with!" said Dwight, practically.

"We have the former!" smiled the curator, producing out of his rucksack a hank of strong green Banks line, "and we'll make a grappling."

Near by grew a tree of the *Erythrina* family, its profuse scarlet blossoms a grand note of color against the gray cliffs. Thousands of swallows swooped about the latter, and the curator eyed them absorbedly.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Dwight, you cut a length from that *Erythrina*, with a whorl of branches at one end, and make a grappling, while I go on a look-see."

Dwight drew his pickax and fashioned a wooden grappling hook with its keen hatchet blade. When he got through the curator had returned from the cliffs, bearing a gelatinous bird nest.

"Here is the edible bird nest of China!" he exclaimed. "I heard that they got them on Aru, as well as in the cliff caves of Borneo. These banks must be the Aru collecting ground. Ever eat one?"

"No!" shuddered Dwight.

"Not half bad. We'll have this one for dessert, to-day. And now le's see that grappling."

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He bound on the end of the cod line, and they found a dead trunk which would form a tolerable raft. Dropping the grappling, with a heavy stone lashed to it, they waited for a short drift, paying out line, and then began to haul. It soon struck something solid. Pulling it in, a great frond of fan coral came to the surface, and attached to its roots was the stone it grew on. The curator cleaned it and examined its structure avidly.

"First news of New Guinea!" he chuckled. "This stone formed part of the river drift, long ago. It is—*slate!*!" he barked, joyously. "And here is a small bit of fossil on one surface. See it? That means coal measures! It confirms my idea that an island three hundred miles wide and fourteen hundred miles long *can't* be all volcanic, or all coral! There *must* be stratified, geological formations in the interior, coal measures, iron ore—all that civilization needs. Try again!"

The next two casts brought up sea ferns, with more chunks of limestone and slate, but the third gave them a yellowish, heavy stone, sandy and streaked with brown.

"Ore! Iron ore!" yelled the curator, before

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even the mud was washed off it. "Regular li'l' scientific expedition of our own, eh, Dwight!"

The boy took the next cast. He brought up a heavy, reddish stone that the curator examined with the greatest interest. "That's cinnabar, red oxide of mercury, unless I miss my guess. It *may* be red iron ore, but seems too crystalline for that. We'll keep this, Dwight, until I can get back to the bungalow and make some chemical tests."

"Is it valuable?" asked the boy, curiously.

"Very!" replied the curator, abstractedly. He was off on one of his mental explorations—explorer's dreams for the future welfare of the world that come to him who opens up new territory for mankind. His very silence awakened a strange presentment of wonders to come in the boy's mind. Gee! it was great to delve into the world's secrets, where no white man had ever been before! He longed for the time for the New Guinea trip to come. A few days more on Aru, and then—into a wild and dangerous country, in search of new discoveries that might prove of the greatest value to the civilized world. It was wonderful to be part of this expedition!

III

PIRATE VISITATIONS

MEANWHILE Nicky and Sadok had been exploring into the untracked jungle to the southward. The low hills of Aru grew more rocky, and the rank jungle gave way to sparse open growth, with rocky soil and wild grass swales here and there. It was hot, out here in the sun, and their canteens were in frequent use. Presently a wild brush turkey jumped from cover and ran cackling and gobbling through the bush growth. He went like a deer, as Nicky whipped out the Officer's Colt and fired on the run. At the same time Sadok's sumpitan coughed and its dart flashed across the grass tops.

"Doubled!" shouted Nicky, as the turkey tumbled and lay kicking stiffly. They ran out to retrieve it. Only the dart of the sumpitan stuck in its side.

"Missed, by hookey!" laughed Nicky at himself. "Judged by Dyak standards, I'm

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a mere swine, I suppose. Eh, Sadok? Say, what poison are you using now?" he exclaimed suddenly. "That turkey fell over like a shot. The upas-tree stuff takes some time —three hours for a man, they tell me."

Sadok held up the little pot of bamboo for him to smell. "Upas vine, *Orang-kichil*" (little chief), he explained. "Him different tree. Red bark. Ver' quick!"

"Smells like strychnia to me," said the boy, wonderingly. "Beats all how nature has provided a specimen of that family of trees all over the tropics throughout the world. India, the *nux vomica*; South America, the *wourali*; here, some new one that I don't know. I'll ask the curator some day."

They broiled two great steaks from the breast of the turkey for the midday meal, for the poison from the darts does not reduce the edibility at all, and Sadok stowed the legs for further food. After the lunch they set out in a generally southeasterly direction, as Nicky knew it would bring them at length to another of those odd channels that divide Aru, and he wanted to see something of Vorkai, the southernmost island. A large screw pine came in sight. Its almost bare branches twisted high into the bright sun-

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light, and the spikes of daggerlike leaves growing in clusters at the branch tips drew an exclamation of pleasure from Sadok, for he was nearly out of pandanus leaf to wrap "spec'mens" in. They went over to it.

"Hi!" called Nicky. "Look who's here!"

A large brown animal was climbing around up near the tops.

"Tree kangaroo. Get him! The curator will want one!" cried the boy, drawing his revolver. He aimed carefully, and at the report the animal flinched, but seemed to maintain its hold in the branches. He fired again, with the same result. The tree kangaroo now moved sluggishly toward another branch.

"Shoot, Sadok! I *must* have hit him, but he sure can carry a lot of lead!"

Sadok raised the blowgun to his lips and held his cupped fist over his mouth. Filling his lungs, he blew a full breath. The dart soared up into the tree top and they saw it sticking from the animal's side. Presently his limbs grew limp and he partly fell, but his long, hooked claws caught in the branches and hung. He made no further move.

"Dead as a mackerel, but I'll have to swarm up after him!" declared Nicky, emphat-

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ically. He was a fearless climber, and he shinned the trunk and was soon in the branches. Worming up one of them, he reached the tree kangaroo. It was like its cousins, the wallaby of New Guinea and the great gray kangaroo of Australia, but with heavy, coarse fur and long, hooked claws especially adapted to climbing.

"Hit him both times, myself," he called down: "Gorry! but he's tenacious of life!" He detached the animal from its hold and dropped it down. It weighed some sixty pounds. They were an hour skinning it, after which Sadok put away some of the choicest meat, for he never let an opportunity for food go by in the jungle.

Then Nicky spied a great blue butterfly, the *Papilio ulysses*, soaring through the tops of the screw pine overhead. They set off in hot pursuit, with the skin of the kangaroo hanging to his belt.

"Dwight will want this fellow!" urged Nicky, stumbling through thickets and over stony and coralline ground. Hermit crabs scuttled out of their way in the underbrush; lizards of every shade streaked across under their feet, but still the lad kept his eyes on that magnificent prize which persistently

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flew high. At length it came down and alighted on a moist spot in the earth, evidently thirsty. He crept up and dropped his helmet over the great metallic-blue beauty.

"Hooray! What a prize for Dwight! How in thunder am I ever going to carry it, though?" He started to pin it to his helmet, but Sadok shook his head.

"Him all tore, in bushes," he objected. "Me show'm." Searching the jungle awhile, he presently came back with a broad, flat cactus leaf which he was busily paring of thorns as he walked. Then he slit it open with his kriss and gouged out a recess for the body of the butterfly in its pulpy interior. Lining it with flat pieces of pandanus, he was ready for *Papilio ulysses*, who was forthwith spread out, flat winged, and then securely bound in his green prison with thongs of rattan.

"Some sandwich!" grinned Nicky as it was slipped into the map pocket of his rucksack. "Worth about fifty dollars just as it stands! Won't I have some fun with old Dwight, with it, though!"

They abandoned collecting for the time, as the canteens were running low and water was getting to be a problem unless they expected to live on what could be poured from

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the air plants that grew profusely in the dry jungle. A small ravine running downhill looked promising, and they climbed down into it. After half a mile it grew swampy, and soon a small, clear stream of fresh water developed. They were filling the canteens at the nearest hollow when voices came through the jungle, the chatter of a child and the deep cackle of an old man, both speaking Papuan. Sadok and Nicky waited. Presently both appeared, coming down to the brook. The man was an almost naked, mop-haired Aru native, carrying a bow and quiver; the pickaninny wore only a string around his fat middle, and had a tiny bow in his hands. Both jumped and dashed back into the jungle, with grunts and squeals of fear, at sight of Nicky.

The latter laughed and called after them reassuringly. Presently the pickaninny appeared, climbing a sapling trunk like a small tree frog. He stopped, peering around the trunk at them curiously, his feet dug into the bark with bunched-up toes, his sinewy little hands wound around the trunk, while his inquisitive face looked at them with a half-fearful expression.

Nicky smiled at him and dug into his

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pockets. He fished out a small bag of beads and held out a few of the sparkling trinkets in his palm. The youngster's eyes snapped. They could see the old man peering at them through the underbrush, arrow on bow, afraid to come out at all.

Nicky beckoned to the boy and motioned to give him some. He finally descended the tree, and with many advances and retreats ventured out to clutch the beads in his small paw. Then he dashed back into the jungle, where a childish yell and the sound of a slap told that the old man had seized him and rifled him of his beads.

Nicky called out the pickaninny and gave him more. Then the old man poked his head out, and Sadok spoke to him in Malay. He knew that tongue enough to talk, and presently they were exchanging news. With much coaxing he was finally got out where Nicky could pour him quite a handful of the green, blue, red, and yellow trinkets. Much impressed, he jerked his thumb over shoulder and invited them to visit their village, which, he said, lay a short distance on.

They followed up what appeared to be something of a trail, and soon the jungle cleared and a blue arm of the sea lay before

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them, with a large island offshore. Nicky took it to be Varkai, but his attention was soon called to the village itself. It was of two palm huts, built on piles about seven feet above the ground, and the place was crowded with natives, most of whom gave one astonished look at Nicky and then bolted for the jungle.

The old man called them back, and presently the *orang-kaya*, or chief, came toward him, holding out his hand for more beads. It was not long before Nicky was the center of an excited throng of chattering Papuans, who fingered his clothing and pranced around him with characteristic native merriment. Nicky was a whole circus in himself, he began to appreciate. Men, women, and children never seemed to tire of standing and gazing at him, after which they would usually do a somersault or roll on the ground with explosions of boisterous laughter. To them he and his clothes were the funniest thing they had ever looked at.

As it was growing late, Sadok arranged for a night's lodgings. A space about ten by twenty feet at the end of one of the huts was cleared off and turned over to their use. Here they laid down their few belongings

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and sat down on mats to watch the strange life around them. A clay floor behind a partition served for a fireplace, where Sadok set about cooking the kangaroo meat. The rest of the hut was jammed with natives talking and laughing incessantly, only ceasing when their eyes were fully occupied in staring at him.

In the midst of it all, a yell, "*Bajak! Bajak!*" ("Pirates! Pirates!") arose, and everyone tumbled out of the hut and poured down to the beach. Great guard fires piled up along shore were lit, and their lurid glare lighted up the whole scene; the proas of the natives hauled up on the beach, the warriors dancing along the shore, brandishing their bows and spears and yelling defiance, and the two huts back a short distance, with the black wall of the jungle behind them, made a wild picture that long remained vivid in Nicky's memory.

Nicky and Sadok had come down, eager to be in the fray, and it seemed to the boy that never had he been in so savage a spot on the earth as in this forgotten corner of Aru, with native warriors around him and a pirate ship from the New Guinea coast somewhere out there on the sea.

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Presently he made her out a long double proa, or catamaran, with one big lateen sail; a small lakatoi, with at least fifty warriors in her, the *orang-kaya* told him. She came on swiftly, under both paddles and sails, and, when some fifty yards off the beach, opened fire with the flash and bang of Singapore muskets loaded with black powder.

Bows twanged all about Nicky, javelins flew through the air, Sadok's sumpitan coughed. Some of the younger warriors turned to run at the sound of gunfire, but the older men held steady, for their homes and ships would be plundered if defeated. Nicky drew his revolver and opened fire in return. The heavy thunder of its .38 special cartridges, close at hand, made all the warriors near him jump and run, but the fact of six flashes along shore and the execution it evidently did among the pirates caused them to stop paddling and haul in sheet as the lakatoi swung around.

"Now, then, Sadok, launch one of those proas and after 'em and we'll have 'em on the run!" barked Nicky, seizing the psychological moment to attack. Sadok called on the *orang-kaya*, and he and a dozen warriors sprang to the nearest proa and launched her,

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Nicky reloading swiftly. As she put out for the pirate lakatoi he opened up with a second burst of pistol shots. The pirate was now making all sail out to sea, the few flashes from her native muskets showing that most of her crew were paddling hard away from them. Presently her mat sail came down and she paddled into the eye of the wind, where their own proa could not follow. Nicky shot a third burst after them as the range widened out of bow shot.

"Gee! the curator told me that New Guinea pirates still attacked the villages in the wilder part of Aru, but I couldn't have believed it!" he muttered to himself. "Now I've been in it—and we drove them off! Must be a fine country we're going to, what Sadok!"

"Plenty bad mans ober dere!" agreed Sadok. "Mus' shoot all time."

They picked up a few dead men out of the dark waters. Hideously streaked with white clay, they wore long white boars' tusks through their noses, and had a peculiar breast guard, made of rows of boars' tusks one above the other, woven in a kind of net of palm fiber. A keen, flat bamboo knife floating in the water gave Nicky a clew as to the tribe.

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"Tugeri!" he exclaimed. "Head hunters. They were after heads and loot, Sadok! A sudden attack and a quick getaway is their style. Last year they appeared suddenly inside the barbed wire of the Dutch fort at Merauke and decapitated six Javanese and got away before the garrison could get out after them. We'll have a time, with either them or the Outanatas!"

The proa returned to shore amid the shouts and rejoicings of all the village capering about the beach. Nicky and Sadok, utterly weary, retired to their portion of the hut to sleep, after the first burst of enthusiasm had died down. But the natives made an all-night orgy of it. Nicky put on his bathing suit headgear and his night socks over his arms and wrists, and turned in on a palm-fiber mat, while mosquitoes hummed about him and the noise and shouting and laughter on shore dulled away in his drowsy ears.

Next day they bade good-by to the chief. He had a present to make, it seemed, in return for the white man's services in repelling their visitors of the night before. Out of a fetish bag, that held evidently the treasures of the entire village, he took a parcel carefully wrapped in cotton. Unwinding it, he

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drew out the skin of a bird of more than ordinary interest. Reverently he unwrapped the last of its bindings, and handed it to Nicky with a smile of grateful pleasure.

“Gorry!” muttered the boy, as he received the present before the whole tribe. “If I’m not wrong, that’s the rarest of the rare—the magnificent bird of paradise! Won’t the curator be tickled, though!”

It was a small bird, but brilliant in the extreme of plumage. The head was covered with small, brown, velvety feathers, but back of its neck arose a fan-shaped ruffle of the most brilliant yellow, backed by a second fan of intense metallic orange. The whole of the breast was rich, deep green, in changeable hues of peacock and purple. The tail was formed of two curved plumes of delicate metallic brown, which curved in airy spirals—a feathered gem as rich in coloring as the vividest-hued humming bird, but far larger.

“The only one!” managed the chief, in Malay, as Nicky bowed his thanks.

“I’ll bet it is! But two have been found in all New Guinea. This is the first reported from Aru. Had it long, Chief?”

“Many years. No more. White man welcome!” grinned the old fellow, gratefully.

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They bade them all good-by and set out by compass for the neighborhood of camp. How to find it was something of a poser, but after a morning's march the lay of the hills began to seem familiar once more and Sadok led them in to the very jungle of tall trees where they had first seen the great birds of paradise.

Dwight was in camp, and overjoyed at Nicky's present of the *Papilio ulysses*, which was so rare a treasure that he at once set about pouring a plaster-of-Paris mold for it and getting it under glass without delay.

"I wish I had a trade-last for you, old scout," said Dwight as he mounted the specimen, "but I haven't. The curator and I have been mineralogizing since you were gone. We found out a lot about the interior of New Guinea—"

"New Guinea!" echoed Nicky, amazedly.

"Yes, New Guinea," retorted Dwight, and he told Nicky of the source of the channels that divide Aru.

"And didn't you get a single sea snake, down there?" asked Nicky, regretfully. "The shallow sea's full of 'em, all highly venomous, you know—"

"I didn't!" shivered Dwight, recalling the

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hours they had spent unprotected on the raft. "That's more in your line. Real sea serpents, eh?"

"Yep. I still believe in the sea serpent," laughed Nicky. "There are plenty of small ones among the New Guinea coasts and up the lagoons. They have a broad, finny tail like an eel, but are true serpents. They swim up near the surface and live on fish, but have poison fangs just like many of the land snakes. That's why I am still convinced that there may be a larger species, sometimes seen far at sea by ships. They have been too often reported to be a myth. But these islands are too dry and rocky for anything but lizards. Where's the curator gone?"

"He went after a black cockatoo which came through the grove awhile ago. I heard his gun recently."

A little later the curator returned, carrying a specimen of the great black cockatoo, a rare find, but it was nothing to his delight over the magnificent bird of paradise that Nicky sprang on him unawares.

"Man dear, where did you get *that!*!" he yelled, examining it avidly. "That's the big prize of the expedition, so far. I guess we can go on to New Guinea, now!"

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On the next day camp was broken and the party steered out of the jungle by compass and hunter's paths, arriving back at the bungalow by nightfall. The following two days were mighty busy, for Nicky, as "snakeologist" of the expedition, had a large assortment of reptile skins to prepare, and the curator, as ornithologist, likewise; and all of them had to be packed in ant-proof tin receptacles before leaving. Dwight, as entomologist, mounted his specimens in flat, glass-covered wooden boxes, which could be packed a dozen at a time in tin cases.

That evening the curator hunted up the captain and crew of the proa and they warped her out into the harbor, for they were to sail for New Guinea the next morning. They all slept aboard once more, and at dawn stood out of the coral reefs and headed around Kobror for the hundred-mile run across to the coast of Dutch New Guinea. Two mornings after, the lofty chain of the Charles Louis Mountains, as the northern end of the Snow Mountains has been named, jutted out of the sea under banks of clouds. Navigators have measured the height of these mountains at six to nine thousand feet, taking observations from the decks of passing vessels, while

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the higher peaks of the Snow Mountains to the south rise to sixteen thousand feet. The mouths of a few rivers in that country have been noted on the map; but the hinterland remains a mystery to the world. Even the South and North Poles are better known.

By afternoon, the mainland had become quite visible, jungly foothills rising ridge on ridge to the base of the Great Precipice, which stretches south for two hundred miles, the greatest precipice in the world. Above it towered the snowy peaks far back in the mainland. They came to realize how utterly unknown and impenetrable it all is, when they awoke next morning to find the proa at anchor in a deep bay, with the jungly mountains all around them and a lagoon thirty miles long stretching back into the hinterland. Mangrove swamps lined the shore in an unbroken line. Here and there a dent in them told of the mouth of a stream. No living human was in sight, but the smoke of signal fires rose from points along shore, and scouting parties of native savages could be made out through the glasses already watching them, swinging through the trees over the mangroves like troops of monkeys. Now and then a long black canoe, with high

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carved prow, would cross the upper lagoon, driven by lines of paddling blacks. The very haste of them spelled danger, the passing of the word through the villages that a strange proa was here. A short raid on shore, a few miles into the jungle at most, unless attempted by a whole regiment of soldiers, would be certain to end in ambush and murder. As for those dense jungles and towering mountains back a day's march into the interior—Unexplored! Danger! Pygmies! Head hunters! was written all over them!

They were examining the shore curiously, with a sense of the utter hopelessness of the undertaking oppressing them, when a huge black lakatoi, or native catamaran, jutted its prow around the point of a cape to seaward. Everyone turned to watch it, and with chatterings and gesticulations the crew sprang to life.

“Lakatoi, *Orang-kaya!*” sang out Sadok, pointing to seaward. She towered like a castle out of the sea. A single mast rose out of her amidships, carrying one long triangular mat sail with deeply incurved ends. Around the mast was a wooden platform, a sort of fighting deck with rails around it, and it was held down on the two log canoes which floated

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the structure by long bamboo arches like the backs of a bridge. The lakatoi was crowded with warriors whose spears and bows and clubs could be made out jutting up through the serried ranks like tiny black jackstraws.

“*Bajak! Bajak!*” (“Pirates! Pirates!”) rose the excited yell forward, and there was a mad scramble of the crew to the waist for weapons.

“Every lakatoi full of natives is a ‘pirate’ to these beggars,” laughed the curator. “They’ll probably prove hostile, though. Look to your guns, boys.”

“Are you going to use the queer pistol, sir?” asked Dwight, curiously, slipping a clip of cartridges into the butt of his automatic.

“Nope. Won’t need to this time,” smiled the curator. “Got to save it for something worse!” He strolled to the deck house and went inside.

Dwight and Nicky watched the lakatoi bowling down toward them. The natives on her were brandishing their bows and spears and did not seem in the least friendly. Their own crew now lined the rails of the proa, armed with a motley collection of Singapore muskets, old repeating rifles of the Spencer vintage, and bows and arrows. They

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yelled defiance at the approaching catamaran and were evidently eager for a fight.

She came steadily on, while everyone crouched behind the gunwales, peering at her. At about fifty yards a cloud of arrows sailed from her and came swishing and singing aboard, striking the deck house and sticking in the soft planks. Dwight picked up one of them, while the thunder of black-powder guns roared out from their own ship. The arrow was of cane, without nock or feathers, a yard long, and had a point of ebony notched with barbs for a foot back.

“Outanatas!” he exclaimed. “They mean business. Give it to ‘em, Nick!” They fired their pistols, hoping to add to the number who had already dropped struggling on the fighting platform. Sadok’s long sumpitan stuck out over the gunwale, and at every cough from its muzzle a yelling, arrow-shooting native would grow livid and fall helplessly among his comrades. Her deck was a shambles, but there were plenty of them left and she came steadily on.

A crash shivered the proa from stem to stern as the lakatoi’s high prows rode up over their gunwale, and twenty blacks leaped aboard, stabbing with their spears over shields

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that were hideous with the carved scrolls of diabolical faces on them. Parangs flashed out among the crew and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle on deck ensued. The crew charged at the invaders, led by Sadok, whose whirling parang-ihlang swung around his head in red flashes that cleft to the bone where they struck. The boys held off, firing deliberately where a particularly fierce native seemed to be carrying all before him. On and on came the boarders in a living black stream, while the air sang with arrows from those still on the lakatoi. They were outnumbered, three to one. Slowly the crew gave back in the furious mêlée, the struggling mass of brown and black men stabbing and cutting in a writhing heap in the waist. Behind them two tall natives fought toward the masts, armed with blazing torches to set the sail afire. With a fierce burst of pistol shots the boys picked them off.

Then the brown flash of the curator's long frame leaped out of the deck house. An arrow pierced his helmet as his arm swept over his head in the cricketer's swing. A brown object like a baseball shot over to the lakatoi, followed by another and another as the arm went on swinging with incredible swiftness.

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Brr-aaam! Brr-aam! Brr-aam! The detonation was frightful, riving the lakatoi apart in great splinters of logs and planks as the grenades exploded. Men, sails, and spars were torn apart in livid flashes of blinding light. The concussion knocked down the combatants on their own ship, while a giant, foamy wave leaped out of the sea and engulfed them, the water falling on the fighting men in the waist like a deluge. Terror-stricken, the boarders gave back, falling like flies before the busy parangs, the survivors leaping headlong into the sea. Of the lakatoi there was nothing left but a mass of floating fragments. In a moment more it was all over and the crew stood breathing heavily, looking at the curator with broad grins of delight.

“Welcome to New Guinea!” laughed the curator, grimly, standing with a fourth hand grenade in his grip, its firing mechanism still unarmed. “I guess that will be about all, Captain,” he said to the *jurugan*, who stood nursing a cut shoulder. “Stop those fellows!” he ordered, for the guns were beginning to bark again at the survivors of the lakatoi swimming in the water. “Let ‘em get ashore and tell all about it. Ought to give us quite a rep! How did you make out,

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boys?" he asked, turning to them coolly. "This was nothing compared with some of our trench parties."

"Nice souvenir you've got, sir!" grinned Nicky, pointing to the long arrow still sticking in the curator's helmet. "Dwight and I got off easy. They didn't seem to pay much attention to us. Never saw a firearm before, I suppose. A lot of the crew seem dead or wounded, though, and I saw Baderoon go down."

"Get hold of Sadok, when you can," ordered the curator. "I see he's busy in the waist. And have them bring Baderoon into the deck house."

Some of the crew were now cleaning up the waist and others were hoisting the anchor by its primitive wooden windlass so as to sail the proa farther up the lagoon. Sadok came up, breathing happily through his wide Malay nostrils.

"Me have'm lov'y fight, *Orang-kaya!*" he beamed. "Catch'm three head!" He grinned, holding up the gory trophies for them to admire. "But you, *Orang-kaya!*" His eyes looked adoringly at the curator. "White man debbil-debbil verree strong! Him fight like hell!"

IV

NICK ENCOUNTERS A DEATH ADDER

BADEROON was carried into the deck house, his long, muscular Papuan frame livid and limp. His rattan shield and bow were borne by Sadok, but from his wrist still dangled a long war club captured by him during the fight. It was of stout ironwood, with a head made of a thick disk of a stone like jade. The club was ornamented with rows of boars' tusks dangling from its handle, alternating with tufts of human hair, and a stout strap held it to the wrist at its handle. Dwight remembered having a glimpse of Baderoon crashing valiantly through the pirate swarm with it, after his arrows were all shot away.

The curator put some brandy to Baderoon's lips and the "boy" revived. The first thing he felt for was the tin mirror in his nose. Finding this still there, he sank back with a sigh of relief.

"There! That's fine!" encouraged the

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curator, holding up the Papuan's woolly head. "You-fellah come good-fellah soon, Baderoon! He's got quite a rap on the roof and he's lost a lot of blood from that arrow wound where it got torn out during the scrimmage. Get me my first-aid, quick. He feels a lot better, now that he knows his charm is all right!" he chuckled.

Baderoon opened his eyes and an irresistible grin cracked his thick lips.

"No *kai-kai* [eat] me-fellah! *Orang-kaya* him go *Boom!—Boom!*—All stop!" he grinned weakly, snapping all his fingers to imitate the explosion.

"All right, boy," beamed the curator. "You-fellah stop, quiet! Will plenty debbil-debbil your arm," he warned, producing the antiseptics. He shot the iodine into the open wound, while Baderoon set his teeth obediently, enduring the pain as best he could. Then his master wrapped on the gauze and bandages and hung the arm in a sling, and they all went out, leaving the native resting easily on a bench, afraid to touch his bandages under fear of the *orang-kaya*'s displeasure.

The proa was bowling along up the lagoon, sailing farther and farther in behind the Charles Louis Mountains as they looked

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about them. A large river flowed in up at the head of the lagoon, they knew, but the curator had decided to take the first creek mouth that looked uninhabited on the mountain shore. Not a sign of a village or even a canoe had they seen, so dense are the mangrove swamps. Finally a dent in them, at the end of a long valley between two of the mountains, came in sight. A careful search of the trees around it with the glasses revealed no more native scouts. The curator judged that they had gotten up to sparsely inhabited country, and the proa was nosed into a little bay with the swift, clear water of the creek running into it. With slack sheet she laid her prow into the mouth of it, the shores slipping by close at hand.

He gave the order to go ashore, and, shouldering their packs, Nicky and Dwight leaped into the jungle, followed by Sadok with a huge crate of empty collection boxes on his back. Baderoone jumped next, able to walk now, and carrying nothing but his bow and shield, a borrowed quiver of arrows, and his captured war club. Then the curator turned to the *jurugan*.

“Come back here in three weeks, Captain,” he said. “We’ll be here waiting for you—

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or dead. Good-by, all! Nice fight, wasn't it!" A flash of grins swept the crew's faces as he seized his light double shotgun and jumped for the bank. The proa backed off and soon her sails filled and she stood down the lagoon, bound for Aru.

"Well, boys, we're on our own!" said the curator, cheerfully, joining the rest of the party. "I reckon we can stay alive for three weeks in this country! And we ought to have something to tell about when we get back here. *Paradisea superba*, the superb bird of paradise, is what we particularly want; also an accurate report on the mineralogy of this region."

They picked their way up over clinking bits of old broken coral, aiming for the high ground above the source of the stream. Skirting along this for some distance, they soon found that it was a small, flat table-land of some ancient coral growth, back of which was the real jungle. The sparse soil was grown with stunted seaside palms and various species of ironwood and lignum vitæ. Through it the stream cut on its way from the interior. The curator had about decided to establish camp here until the region could be investigated before going farther, when

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a cry from Nicky aroused them. It came from farther upstream.

"This way, fellows!" it called; "here's something interesting!"

They followed the call, to pitch down the coral bank to a small beach by the stream-side, clear of mangroves. An abandoned outrigger sail canoe lay hauled up on the shore. The coral flat had protected it from the moist jungle rot, but its weatherbeaten planks showed that it had been there for several years.

"A crocodile slipped into the water as I came down here, and found—this," announced Nicky. "It looks like a Ceram or Salwatty boat to me. See the single mast and the two bamboo outriggers."

She was about twenty-five feet long, with a bamboo platform overhanging the body of the canoe on each side astern, its outer edges guarded with stout bamboo rails. The body was of flat, hewn planks, built up on a wide keel hollowed from a single log. The New Guinea boats were all made of one or more log canoes, hollowed out of a single log, they knew; this canoe came from Ke' or Ceram, but of its history there was not a trace. The sail, of woven cotton, still lay wrapped around

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its yards. Two lengths of bamboo, about twenty feet long and six inches thick, formed the floating outriggers, which were lashed to bow-shaped hardwood spars notched across the gunwales. All her rattan lashings were in as good shape as the day she was made.

An involuntary shiver of apprehension went over the party. Others had come—and never returned!

"Some poor devils ventured in here after paradise birds and got eaten, I presume," said the curator. "It's a cinch they never got back! We'll adopt her. We may need her some day! Here's good water and dry ground, fellows! Let's camp here and collect within easy distance until we know the lay of the land. And we'll all keep together for the present, boys," he ordered, meaningly.

The parangs got busy, and soon a space was cleared in the underbrush where the two tent flys of the boys and the curator's hammock could be swung. Sadok disappeared into the jungle, whence the sound of his chopper soon came, and presently he returned to camp, bearing a long green pole of bamboo across his shoulders. This he notched with footsteps cut above each joint, and the pole was then laid upright in the

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fork of a small ironwood tree. Up it the curator climbed, to look out over the country.

"That was some look-see, boys!" he announced, coming down from the pole. "The mountains lie right near us, to the right, with a strip of deep jungle, about half a mile wide, beginning just beyond this table of coral land. We'll have to go through it with compass and parang. This stream comes down from a notch in the mountains, with some high grass plateaus shelving out from their sides. It's a great country, and I doubt if anyone finds us for a time yet. I did not see a sign of a hut or a village. It's safe to collect anywhere on this coral ground, I think. And there are thunderheads coming over the mountains to the west right now, so make your tents secure for the night and cook whatever you're going to before the rain comes."

Nicky did not care to eat just then, so he set out on an exploring trip. For some distance he poked along, slowly, above the course of the stream, starting at every rustle of big land crabs scuttling for their holes in the underbrush. The growth of tangled ironwoods was so thick that he had to hack with his parang to get even through the thinnest

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vistas. He moved slowly along, the thrill of being alone in an unknown land peopled with savage cannibals putting his nerves on edge. He recalled stories of how the Outanatas did not eat a man whole, like the South Sea Islanders, but had a playful way of cutting off a leg and binding up the stump, saving the man for further feasts while they ate the leg before his eyes; and how, last year, six Javanese had been suddenly decapitated by the Tugeri, just inside the barbed wire of the Dutch fort at Merauke, and how—

Brrrrumm!—right behind him! It might have been the grunt of a wild boar: it might have been—anything! Nicky jumped, whirling in the air, electrified with fear, and landed on his feet with gun cocked and staring eyes. Nothing whatever was visible. The dense brush was as silent and inscrutable as the Sphinx. Trying to quiet his pounding heart, the boy began to turn cautiously around, when—*Brrrruumm!* right behind him again! He whirled about, angry this time, looking with all his eyes for something to shoot at.

Brruum!—*Brrumm!* The sound seemed to come from overhead, and, looking up, Nicky saw a large air plant, its blatant flowers in

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showy profusion—and hovering in front of them was a large tropical humming bird!

The revulsion was too great! The boy threw back his head and yelled with hysterical laughter.

“Frightened to death by a humming bird!” he whooped. “*Yow-yowri!* Well, it’s time I shoved along and accomplished something!”

He pushed his way through the thickets, defiantly now, hoping that something *would* turn up worth shooting at. Presently he came to a little open glade grown up with saw grass, with a small pond in the center of it. As he burst through the thicket two animals rose up out of the grass across the pond and went jumping off, sailing over the yellow field in long leaps that carried them twenty feet to the bound. Nicky did not have to be told that they were wallabys, the New Guinea species of kangaroo. He whipped out his long-barreled Officer’s Model and poised its fine sights on the rearmost wallaby. He had learned through long practice that his revolver was as good as a rifle at any range up to seventy-five yards, if well handled, and he depended on it for all big game. As the gun barked, the wallaby pitched down, rolling over and over like a rabbit in the saw

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grass, its long hind legs kicking convulsively. The other wallaby soared in a frantic series of hops, and reached the jungle before the wavering sights of the revolver could be steadied on it.

Nicky started to dash through the grass around the pond after his prize, but the sudden soar of a small animal like a flying squirrel, but much larger, brought him to a full stop. It had left the topmost branches of a tall thorn tree on the edge of the jungle and had volplaned downward in a long flight across the opening. Nicky's ready shotgun sprang to shoulder and he covered it in full flight and pulled trigger. The creature fell into the grass as he blew the smoke from his barrel and slipped in another shell. A single step forward developed more life, for a large green grasshopper like a katydid sprang from its depths, made a short flight, and lit near by. It had a peculiar shield like a leaf curved backward over its head. Nicky whipped off his helmet to capture it, for he recognized the great shielded grasshopper of New Guinea and he knew that Dwight would want it.

He crept forward stealthily, when his eye was attracted by the bright flash of orange

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and black where a medium-sized bird was hopping from branch to branch in the thicket to his right. One glance at the quantity of long feathers of an intense orange hue that adorned its neck told him that it was the rare paradise oriole, closely allied to the true paradise birds and a specimen of the utmost value to the curator.

Nicky raised his gun, embarrassed at all these sudden riches of natural history that surrounded him. It occurred to him that this little pond bore all the aspects of the African water hole, in that it attracted wild life as a sort of center, and that he could spend a long time right here without beginning to exhaust its possibilities. As the gun barked the bird fell tumbling through the thicket and the boy reloaded, wondering what new marvel would develop at his very next step. Then the grasshopper claimed his attention. It had made another short flight. This time the helmet scooped him in. He paused a moment to wonder over the remarkable camouflage that nature had provided for this insect, for the shield resembled a green leaf so closely that a passing hornet or bird, which were its chief enemies, would be completely deceived.

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In lieu of a better place to put it, Nicky pinned it on his helmet and then resolutely trailed through the grass to find the small flying creature that he had shot, unmindful of the quantities of insects that he had stirred up, the very number and diversity of which would have driven Dwight into a frenzy.

"Must tell the old scout about this!" muttered the boy. "He'd camp here a week! Ought to be something in my line, too, around this water. Heigho! What in the dickens is this?" he exclaimed, picking up the animal. It *looked* like an opossum, but it had broad furry membranes extending from fore to hind leg exactly like our own flying squirrel.

"Flying opossum, by ginger!" cried the boy, for he had of course read up on all the natural history of New Guinea that is known. He examined the curious creature with all the sensations of the true naturalist. It is a far different thing to read of these examples of nature's marvelous diversity, than to actually handle and examine the creatures themselves. Like all but two of New Guinea's mammals, this was a marsupial, a reminder of that far time when all of Papua, Australia,

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and the adjacent islands connected by the shallow sea was one vast continent, entirely separated from Asia by deep sea. *Why* did this continent evolve marsupials in every form of animal life, even the bear and the wolf? Here was the counterpart of our flying squirrel, with the same protective capacity to fly, but a marsupial and by structure most closely allied to the opossums. It was surely a brave conundrum!

He retrieved the paradise oriole and started out to the pond again, but a sharp hiss in the grass stopped him like an electric shock. A black and mottled snake rose threateningly, with steely tongue quivering from its mouth. Nicky recoiled, shielding his eyes with his arm, for he had recognized with a shock of loathing fear the dreaded death adder of Papua, which can spit poison with considerable accuracy for more than six feet. He backed off rapidly, watching the snake narrowly, for he knew that it would attack with great swiftness, blinding his eyes before striking. Then his shotgun sprang to shoulder as the snake moved toward him through the grass, and he pulled trigger as its horned head appeared for an instant over the tubes. Out of the mist of smoke and the confusion

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of the recoil Nicky had time to realize but one thing—that head was still weaving toward him with the speed of an express train! It would not do to aim the gun again and so expose his eyes. He turned to fly, dropping his gun and tugging frantically at his parang. As it flashed from its wooden sheath he made a swift backhand slash with it, urged by the imminent horror of the snake being close behind him. He felt the parang's blade cut bone, and at the same instant something soft and wet struck the back of his neck and a hot, irritating pain seared his flesh. Putting up his hand as he ran, he found his fingers covered with a pale yellow fluid that burnt where it touched. Nicky stopped at the thicket and faced about. A violent thrashing of coils in the grass behind him, now flashing up the white belly, now the mottled back, told him that he had beheaded the adder. He went back cautiously, for he appreciated now that the borders of that pond would be alive with snakes. He got to water finally, and began washing strenuously. The pain still kept up, however, and he could feel a large blister raising on the skin of his neck.

“I must get back to camp quickly, where

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the curator can paint me with iodine!" he muttered to himself. "What would happen if I should faint here in the jungle!"

He found the head of the death adder and wrapped it in his handkerchief and tied it to his belt. The body was about eight feet long. Dragging it over to the thicket, he hung it on a bush and then skirted around, keeping a sharp watch at his feet, and finally came out to the body of the wallaby.

It was very like the great gray kangaroo of Australia, but much smaller and reddish in color. He swung it over his shoulder and retraced his steps to the thicket. Tying the long body of the adder to his belt, he pushed for camp. He felt dizzy and weak, and sick at the stomach, and his neck burnt like a fire. Staggering on, he sought the thinnest openings in the brush and so unconsciously retraced his steps; but the briars tore at him and his burden with maddening tenacity and he steadily grew weaker and weaker. At last the welcome sound of voices and chopping came to his ears, and with a last burst of endurance he drove through the thickets and fell forward limply, just over the edge of their clearing.

The curator dropped his microscope and

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notebook and ran over, followed by Dwight, who had heard his startled exclamation.

“Man, animal, or reptile?” giggled Dwight, looking down at the odd huddle of wallaby, snake, and boy that was Nicky.

“Cut it, and call Sadok and Baderoon! Quick!” snapped the curator, sharply. “Something has happened to him. Nothing is ever trivial in this jungle, Dwight!” He pulled off the wallaby as he spoke, and his eyes fell at once on the red scar on the back of Nicky’s neck. He examined it carefully, but no sign of fangs was visible.

“Go get the medicine kit!” he barked, as Dwight left on the run. Baderoon came up, and his eyes opened as they lit on the body of the snake.

“*Koikoim meten!*” he gasped, horror-stricken. “Me go find’m taboo for him—quick! Boy him die!” He dashed off into the jungle. Sadok bent over, shaking his head. The snake was unfamiliar to him and he could do nothing. Dwight returned with the medicine kit and the curator painted the spot with iodine, but it seemed to have no effect. Nicky was in a kind of swoon, from which all efforts, even brandy, failed to arouse him. Faces lengthened as the minutes went

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by with no improvement. Finally Baderoon emerged from the jungle, carrying a spray of some kind of plant.

“Me find’m taboo!” He grinned cheerfully. He crushed the weed in his hands and rubbed the juice on the spot, kneading it in and crooning a wild Papuan chant the while. After some five minutes of it, which seemed like five weeks to the white men looking on, Nicky opened his eyes.

“Gee! I could—write a—fine story—about this!” he sighed, weakly. “I’ve been conscious all the time,” he went on, more strongly as Baderoon kept up his vigorous kneading, “but for the life of me I could not move anything. Seemed to be kind of paralyzed. Baderoon—you’re a brick!” he cried, grasping the mop-haired Papuan’s horny hand.

“*Orang-kichil* [little chief] all right? Me make’m *koikoim* debbil-debbil!” he grinned, kneading steadily and applying more of the pale-green plant juice.

Nicky told them all about it as he steadily grew stronger, and finally he sat up and undid the handkerchief holding the snake’s head. “It’s a fine specimen, all right, though!” he maintained, stoutly. “Baderoon, you fix’m *koikoim*’s—isn’t it?—*koikoim*’s head, and

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we'll save the whole of him for mounting.
Me for a sleep for a thousand years!"

They got Nicky tucked away for the night and his tent fly secured down strongly like a wedge tent, for great plashes of raindrops were beginning to fall and the rolling thunder came nearer and nearer down the mountains. Then came the roar of the rain, and bright, vivid flashes of lightning rent the twilight.

Sadok and Baderoon moved their mats under the curator's hammock fly, while rain drove in sheets through the tropical night. It was furious while it lasted, but by eight o'clock the storm had died to distant mutterings far back in the interior, and a pitch blackness ensued. Then the stars came out, and in the moist, steaming stillness the camp went off to sleep for their first night in the New Guinea jungle.

V

THE OUTANATAS

FOR the next few days the water hole became a star collecting ground for the entire expedition. Nicky was laid up a day in camp, recovering from the effects of the death adder's poison, but he soon came to haunt the pond, for it and the stream that flowed past their camp were his main reliance for abundance of reptilian life.

"Here's where we make the main collection, fellows," said the curator, as he and Sadok came back to their temporary headquarters loaded with curious hook-billed Macrorhina kingfishers, magnificent crowned pigeons, Manucodia starlings of brilliant hues of plumage, blue flycatcher wrens, and many other species of the abundant bird life of New Guinea.

"We'll fill the main collection crates with a representative collection in all four divisions of natural history. That will leave us free to concentrate on the rarer varieties during

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the exploration trip," he continued. "I vote we have a pig hunt to-morrow. Baderoon tells me he has discovered plentiful rootings down in that mass of high jungle that separates us from the mountain chain. We ought to lay in some fresh meat and cure some bacon before starting into the interior."

"Me for the hogfest!" crowed Nicky. "I've about nailed every lizard, tree frog, and snakelet in this vicinity. What ammunition shall we use, sir?"

"For wild boar I'm inclined to the solid ounce ball in a twelve-gauge shotgun," grinned the curator. "It's the only thing that will stop 'em at close range. Beats a high-power rifle all hollow, for it knocks 'em down to stay. I brought along some shells loaded with three-quarter ounce ball for our twenty-gauges, and we'll serve 'em out to-morrow."

On the next day the pig hunt was started. The wild pig of New Guinea, *Sus papuana*, is in several respects peculiar to himself. Armed with those long tusks that the natives use for nose ornaments and breast shields, he is wild, long legged, and speedy as a deer. He has the typical Asiatic screw tail, in place of the long straight one of the wild boar of

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Europe, but is almost hairless and provided with thick horny shoulder plates under the skin that will turn almost any bullet. Like all pigs, he fights well when cornered, is very tenacious of life, and attacks with a slashing charge of his tusks, attempting to upset a man with his momentum and then turn and rend out his ribs with a powerful stroke of the long, sharp tushes.

Baderoon and Sadok disappeared into the jungle to get above their feeding ground and act as beaters, while the curator and the boys took up vantage points a short distance back from the creek in the swampy bottoms.

Dwight soon found himself alone under the tall foliage, with vines and creepers crisscrossing in front of him and dense undergrowth, making it impossible to see thirty feet away, all around him. Great, slippery roots buttressed out from the tree trunks, crawling over the muddy soil like alligator backs. Nicky and the curator were farther on down the creek, both as silent as the grave, for it was essential to make no noise. Dwight realized that he had been given the post of honor this time, and that it would be he who would bear the brunt of the charge. In spite of himself he found himself shivering

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with excitement, opening his gun to peer at the shells, setting the safety on and off, and otherwise betraying symptoms that looked very like fear. He had never hunted wild boar before, and he found himself wishing that he had a bayonet or a spear or something to defend himself at close quarters. As it was, he would have to depend entirely on steady nerves and a well-placed bullet.

Then, far up the jungle, he heard the distant noises of the infernal din that Sadok and Baderoon were making, yelling and beating with their spears on their shields. It was followed presently by faint squeals, and later he could hear the grunts, it seemed, of a whole drove of wild boars. They were coming like the wind, the undergrowth crackling under their hoofs, vines tearing and ripping and carrying away bush growth, and then the jungle floor fairly shook, as if locomotives were thundering down on him.

A swishing and waving in the undergrowth showed him that they would pass him about thirty yards off, between him and the creek. Dwight sternly repressed an impulse to hang back and let them go by. To see clearly to shoot, he would have to run forward and plant himself nearly in their path.

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“Don’t be a coward! *Into* this, you boob!” he swore at himself, as he drove forward through the tangle of jungle growth. He ran out on a great prone trunk and peered into the moving bushes. They were going by, grunting and squealing with mixed terror and anger—five of them, and two great big fellows, with long, wicked ivory tushes curling around their snouts. Dwight raised the twenty-bore, followed along back of the shoulder of the nearest, and fired. Instantly a bawl of pain and rage went up as the boar stopped, whirling about a broken foreleg and looking about him red eyed with rage. The rest went thundering on, and a boom from the curator’s gun rang through the jungle. Dwight’s boar spied him and came hitching toward him on three legs, grunting his rage. The boy had opened his gun to slip in another shell, so eager was he to have plenty of shots. In an electric shock of realization, he saw that he had not time to do anything of the sort. Hastily snapping it shut, he drew a wavering bead and fired again. The ball hit somewhere in the shoulder and glanced off, but it put the boar in a frightful rage. He charged the log with a red glare in his eyes and leaped up, his tusks sweeping the

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upper surface of it. Dwight leaped off and reloaded frantically in the brief breathing space left him. With a leap like a deer, the boar went over the trunk, while Dwight fired both barrels full into his head at six feet, and then turned and dashed into the jungle. A great vine caught under his armpits as the boy crashed into it, and it laid him sprawling in the thick bush growth. He wormed through it desperately, and reloaded, wondering all the time why he had not been gored and trampled to death. His heart pounded so that its rapid beats were audible as he opened his mouth to breathe. Then he realized that the boar had not followed, and, plucking up courage, he stole back to look.

There lay the boar, threshing feebly about beside the log, his life slowly ebbing away. Dwight watched him, afraid to come nearer, scarce daring to hope that he had won. A final convulsion, and the boar seemed to go to sleep as he gave a last little sigh and stretched his great head out on the jungle.

“Whoops! I’ve got him!” yelled Dwight, stepping nearer to prod at the carcass with his gun barrels.

“Had a fat time with him, too, judging

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by the noise!" laughed the curator's voice.
"I got one, too—nice pig."

Dwight remembered that the curator had fired but one shot—coolly and carefully placed, no doubt, but he was not ashamed. He had done well, for his first try! Nicky had not fired at all, for the rest of the drove had swerved and crossed the creek in a splash at the two gunshots. He and the curator came over to look at his trophy.

"Ought to cut out those and wear them in your nose, to be really fashionable in New Guinea, Dwight!" laughed Nicky, pointing to the razor-sharp tushes. "I was just coming over to lend a hand to help the curator up a tree when he fired, and the rest of the family beat it across the creek. Out o' luck, as usual!" he grinned, cheerfully.

After a time Sadok and Baderoon came up and set about butchering the two pigs. The bacon flitches and hams from them were cured over a smoke rack during the next two days, while the party dined on fresh liver, and, later, pork chops, after the game had hung for a day.

On the third morning the whole party left camp with two days' provisions, to make a

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first exploration of the table-lands back in the mountains. They steered across the jungle by compass, Sadok and Baderoon clearing the way with their parangs. Then the ground began to rise, and slowly they worked up from the wild profusion of equatorial jungle into the more arid growths of the mountain side. The going became easier, as on all high ground, and the nature of the wild life and vegetation began to change. New insects and birds became numerous, and their progress was slow because nearly all of them were wanted for the collections, and the curator knew from long experience that the time to take a specimen was when you saw him, for you might not get another.

By midafternoon they had reached the plateaus near the notch in the mountains, and here they encountered their brook again. But what a different stream from the smooth, deep, jungly creek flowing silently down below through overhanging arches of vines and creepers! Here its bed was wide and pebbly as any northern stream, the creek following the deepest parts, with dry bars of pebbles scoured clean by former freshets. Wild trees of the coffee and Euphorbia families, thorns, and acacias dotted the stream

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banks. It was hot up here, but dry, and a pleasant place to live in. The curator was examining the pebbles eagerly, to get some idea of the rock formations of the mountains, when Sadok whistled softly and pointed upstream. A party of tall black natives was threading through the forest, and their leaders were already splashing across the stream bed! They stopped instantly as they spied the khaki helmets of the explorers, and more warriors joined them. It was a war party, as they could tell by the white-streaked faces, the weapons they carried, and the white breastplates of boars' tusks that they had seen in museums before.

"Outanatas," said the curator, quietly, as their party drew together for support. "We'll stand right here and watch what they do."

The tall, slender, mop-haired savages splashed through the creek, about twenty-five of them in the party, and they were armed with spears, bows, and clubs. Each man had a shield on his left arm, made of some tough wood, carved in red and white scrolls. They shouted and yelled at the curator's party as they bunched together on the strand of the creek, and then came running swiftly down the pebbly drift, their

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long skinny legs shining with white amulets of sea shells.

"Holler, 'Friends!' at them, Baderoon-boy," said the curator as they came nearer, hesitating and staring at the white men.

"*Muana komia!*" cried Baderoon, dropping his bow and shield in sign of amity.

The natives yelled. Whether it was friendly or derisive they could not tell. Then they formed in an irregular line and began a war dance toward the party.

"They're showing off, I think," declared the curator. "If they meant war, every man jack of them would have melted into the jungle and be shooting at us by now. Still, we'd better be on our guard."

He dug into a flap pocket of his belt and took out a trench grenade, while the boys loosened their revolver flaps cautiously, their shotguns hanging loosely in their arms. Sadok reached for his parang, but the curator stopped him.

"Not yet, Sadok; we can't make the first hostile move. I'll give an order if I think they're getting dangerous."

The natives came on, yelling and dancing. Most of them wore long white boars' tusks through the nose and curving up around

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their cheeks, giving them a singularly fierce aspect. Some had white shell combs dangling low over their foreheads, and nearly all wore a collection of white shell rings hanging in their ears. They brandished their spears and clubs as they advanced and retreated, going through the pantomime of mimic warfare. They made diabolical faces and thrust out red tongues at the explorers as they came closer, but whether it was war or peace even Baderoon could not tell them.

The boys watched the war dance, striving to quiet the shivers of apprehension that *would* persist in rising. It was harder to bear there than any amount of fighting, and they had much preferred standing off any number of natives well hidden in the bush.

At about fifteen yards off, the line of natives had worked themselves into furious action, stabbing with their spears at the air, the rows of hideous shields dancing like evil genii from some other world. As more of them spread out on each flank, a guttural shout came from one of the tallest.

“Shoot, *Orang!*” shrieked Baderoon, but he was too late! From behind each native’s shield swung a black arm holding a short stick of bamboo. They swept forward like

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flails, and instantly the air was filled with blinding fine sand and ash dust. It closed their eyes with the acrid, cutting particles, and involuntarily their arms went up to shield their faces, while guns went off aimlessly. Sadok flashed out his parang in the cloud, and the curator jumped back to throw his bomb, but there was no room to use it. The natives closed in on them in a whirlwind of grabbing, skinny arms. Dwight saw stars as a club descended on his helmet, and everything went white before him. He was dimly conscious of a last impression of Sadok standing off three of them with his parang, and the curator buffeting his way through the shields toward him with bare fists, when his senses left him. . . .

When he came to he was lying on the ground with his arms tightly bound behind him. Nicky and the curator were sitting up, also tied, and beyond them was Sadok, his head covered with blood where they had clubbed him. An occasional suppressed groan came from Baderoon; only themselves could understand the agony he was enduring, with his wounded arm ruthlessly trussed up like their own.

The Outanatas were chattering and arguing

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around them. Finally a long rope was brought and the captives tied together, a loop of it in a single knot around each of their necks, so that any attempt to escape would bring it tight. Then they were all dragged to their feet and formed in a line, with a double file of natives on each side, and the party set off through the jungle.

The way led back through the same trail the natives had come up on, the jungle path working gradually down toward the lagoon. The boys did little talking, for it seemed to make their captors angry, but they had plenty of time to think as they marched along. Dwight noted that the curator still carried his queer pistol, and their own were in the holsters yet, for the natives had dropped the flaps in disgust at the first sight of steel. Their shotguns were being carried by a couple of natives, each holding it with a wad of moss in his hand to protect it from the touch of steel, against which they had a taboo. Sadok's sumpitan, with its spear blade lashed to its muzzle like a spear, they could understand, and his parang and Nicky's were in the hands of their captors. They evidently respected these as real weapons of war, as they also did Baderoon's bows and

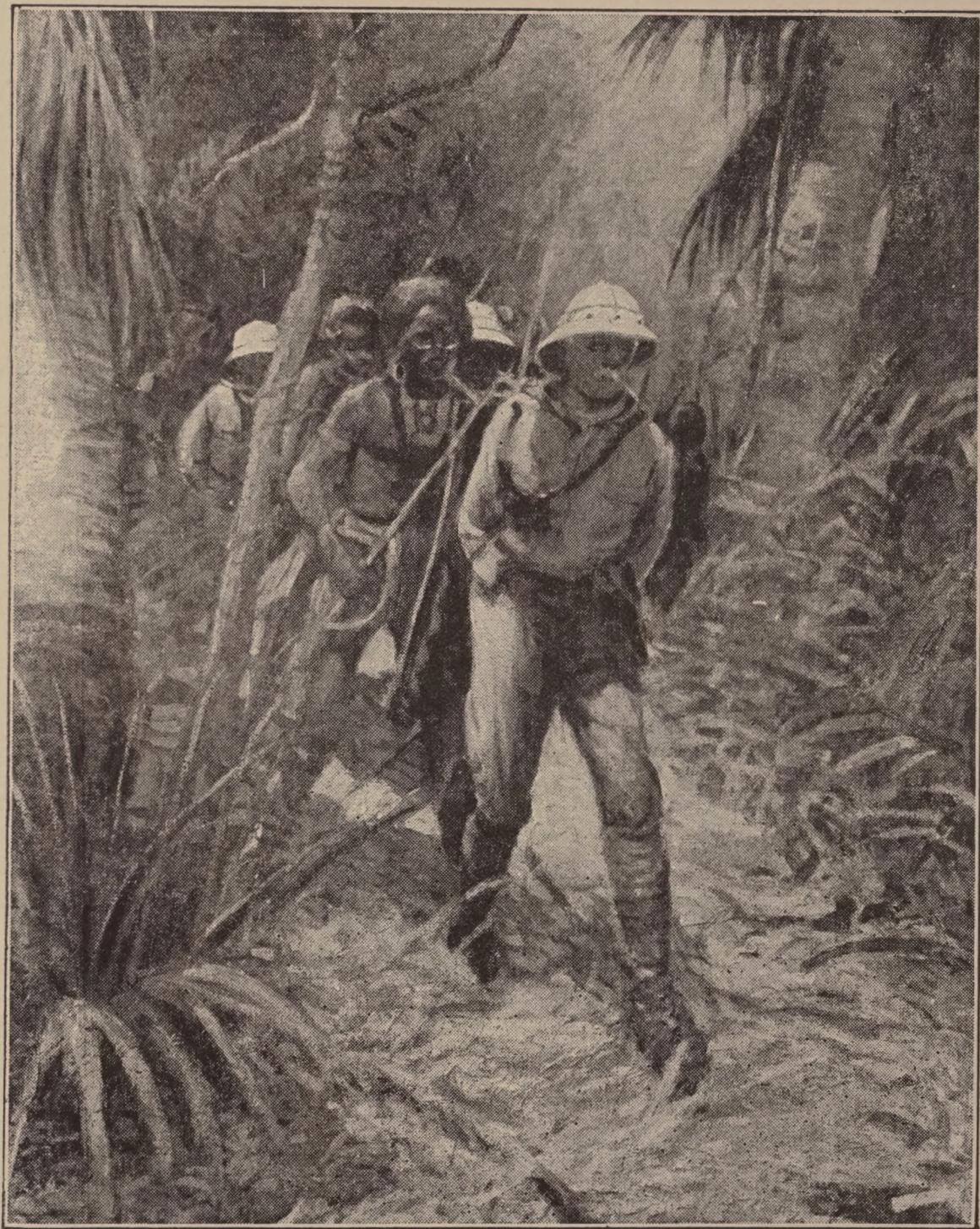
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arrows and both the shields, for these were being carried along as trophies.

By nightfall the trail pitched suddenly downward toward the lagoon, and the warriors raised their voices in an exulting chant. It was answered by the deep boom of war drums, and presently they came down to a native village on the shore of the lagoon. The mangroves had been cleared away here, and on the beach were some twenty long black canoes, hauled up, their high carved prows looming darkly against the glassy surface of the waters, greenish orange in the dying hues of twilight.

The huts of the village were of bamboo, arched up from ground to ground over a stout ridge pole, and thatched with palm attap. An excited crowd of native men gathered around their party, while the warriors went on singing and dancing, telling in vigorous pantomime the story of their capture. There seemed to be no central chief, but some of the older and more powerful warriors at length came to some sort of agreement, and they were all thrust into an empty hut, the men who had captured their weapons claiming the duty of being guards.

The explorers sat watchful on the clean



THE WAY LED BACK THROUGH THE SAME TRAIL THE NATIVES HAD
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sand floor of the hut, with their guards standing in the doorway. A great fire was started out in front, and they could see even the women and children, now, venturing from the huts. Log after log was piled on the fire, and then pairs of natives passed the door, carrying between them huge, rounded stones. One after another these were laid on the fire, and gradually they became red hot underneath, while the upper surfaces were smooth and sooty in the licking flames.

"Prenty bad!" whispered Baderoon in the curator's ear. "Fire dance! Make you-fellah hopp'm on rock till he cook you' foots. Den dey *kai-kai* dat foots. Leg, he stop, 'til next time. All *kai-kai* some day."

It was time to act! The curator shifted his trick ring with his thumb and opened the catch when it came inside his palm. His fingers closed around his right wrist and sought the binding of twisted pandanus leaf. A steady scratch-scratching of the little blade in the ring on the leaf fiber went on, while their guards looked out the door, watching the preparations.

VI

THE CURATOR'S AIR PISTOL

THE flickering red lights from the dying flames of the fire lit up the walls of the hut as the curator sat, free, with his hands still behind him, considering what to do next. The fiery glow of embers under the hot stones urged him to speedy action, for already the tom-toms of trumpet-shaped Papuan war drums and the whang of stringed instruments had struck up. The natives were yelling for the first prisoner to be brought out. He did not propose that their party should go on stumps for the rest of their lives.

He reached carefully for the hunting knife in his belt, and, leaning up against Baderoon, his arm slipped behind him and cut his thongs. Then the knife was passed on, and Baderoon freed Sadok. The three silently arose and crept toward the guards leaning out the door. Fingers moved stealthily for their necks, while the boys watched them tensely. With a sudden pounce, both guards

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were seized and dragged within the hut without a sound. Sadok was strong as a gorilla, and his man soon ceased to struggle. The curator and Baderoon had more trouble with theirs, for the black had only one good arm, but the guard was finally subdued, gagged, and tied after a silent tussle in which all three joined. Then the boys were freed, and Sadok jumped for his sumpitan, parang, and kriss, which leaned up against the walls of the hut.

“This way—quick now!” hissed the curator, pointing to the blank rear wall of the hut. Sadok ripped a door in it with his kriss, while the curator drew his pistol, inserted a small metal cylinder in its breech, and shoved down hard with the muzzle of the weapon on an abandoned shield of the guards. A crinkly noise like a spring came from within it, and he smiled grimly and replaced the pistol in its holster. Then they all crept out through the back wall into the dark jungle, Baderoon helping himself liberally to weapons as he left.

Dwight, tingling with excitement, automatic in hand, crawled along on all-fours behind the curator, who followed Sadok, and so they worked steadily toward the beach

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over the thick, soft duff. At length the last of the line of canoes, close to the boundary of mangroves, rose up ahead, and, one by one, they crawled around both sides of it, keeping below the gunwale out of sight. The lurid glow of the fire was behind them, and, silhouetted against it were circles of mop-haired savages, singing in unison with the beat of the drums, the warriors dancing around the fire.

Quietly they rose and lifted the bow of the long boat. Her stern was afloat and she gave easily, but it took their combined strength to shove her out. At last she floated, and they all got in, Sadok giving her a last artful shove that sent her silently around the end of the mangroves and out of sight. They groped for paddles, dipped them noiselessly, and stole along, close to shore, not even a ripple coming from her prow. The noise behind them grew gradually more indistinct, until the rhythmical dub-dub of the drums alone reached them.

“Whoosh!” sighed Nicky, at last, and it seemed he had been holding his breath for a week. “Some get-away! But it’s about time those beggars went for their lunch, though!” he observed, facetiously, while his

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powerful shoulders swept the paddle easily. “‘My—word!’ as Bentham would say, but I don’t fancy being fried on stones for these heathen! I’ve contributed too many blankets and things to missionary boxes—and I want my money back!” he laughed.

“Quiet!” ordered the curator, sternly. “This show isn’t over yet, and there may be scouts along shore. We’ve got to make time!”

They bent to the paddles, driving the heavy canoe along down the shore of the lagoon. Fifteen tense minutes passed, while black palm fronds and ragged banana leaves swept by overhead past the stars. They had put nearly a mile between them and the landing when—

“Hist!” called the curator, stopping his paddle suddenly.

A riot of excited yells came faintly through the jungle.

“They’re wise! Hep, boys! *hep!*” They drove the canoe along as fast as she could be made to go. She needed at least ten paddlers to get any real speed out of her, and the boys realized that there would be more doings this night! A clearer burst of sounds told that the natives had come down

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to the beach and discovered their missing canoe. Then torches glared out over the black, glassy water, and presently a fleet of canoes set out, each with a blazing brand flaming on its prow. Some of them set out across the lagoon, others went upstream, and eight started down the shore, moving abreast and covering the water far out. Nothing could escape them!

“Make for the open, Sadok!” called the curator over his shoulder to the Dyak, who was stern paddle. “We haven’t a chance here, but we might get by them out beyond the last one out there.”

They drove the canoe out on the broad bosom of the lagoon, the lights from the eight flares streaming across the water to them in long red pencils, and it seemed incredible that they were not seen already. The curator, however, knew better the actual range of a flare visible from the eyes of a man in the boat with it, for he had tried it before, jacking deer. The lights came steadily on, yells and whoops blaring over the waters. The canoes soon passed them, in a long, straggly line between them and the shore.

They stopped their own boat and watched their pursuers.

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“Gee! it’s a clean escape!” exulted Dwight, “and we’re bows on, so it’s impossible to see us—” The enthusiasm in his voice trailed off as they all paused, holding their breaths, to watch the flare on the nearest canoe. It seemed to be parting in two and the second light grew to a long flame. Then it suddenly rose in a high, curving arc as a flaming javelin went up like a rocket. A weird glare lit up the water far and wide.

“Clever stunt! Those savages are sure resourceful, I’ll say!” admired the curator. “We’re *it*, all right!”

A babel of yells arose from the nearest canoe as he spoke, and her light began to move out toward them, the flashes of her paddles winking like swiftly waving bars of light. The other canoes changed course likewise, and the whole pack fanned out in a sort of V, with the nearest canoe leading. A second flaming javelin soared into the night and lit up the waters. Diabolical war whoops burst out from all the canoes this time, and amid exulting yells a few long-range, roving arrows fell into the lagoon around them.

“Don’t anybody shoot, except Sadok, until I say the word!” gritted the curator, “and I want you boys to call me eighty yards as

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near as you can judge it when that canoe comes that near!"

Arrows from the nearest boat now began to whistle overhead and fall into the bay with a sharp *chrrp!* like quenching hot iron.

"Eighty yards, I think, sir," whispered Dwight a few moments later as he peered over the gunwale.

"Just about," muttered the curator, aiming his pistol carefully over braced knees. A sharp *kjkrrr!* came from the weapon as he pulled trigger. A tiny spark swept in a flat trajectory over to the canoe, and then, like detonation of thunder close at hand, came a stunning report and the white, blinding glare of the explosion of a shell. The flash gave them one tremendous, significant glimpse of flying splinters and the cannibal canoe doubling up like a broken stick—and then came pitchy, inky darkness, followed by the shouts of the savages swimming in the water and the roar of a wave rolling swiftly toward them which rocked their canoe to her beam ends.

"Gad! I hate to shoot up these beggars, even if they are cannibals bent on dining off us!" exclaimed the curator, reloading. "Hope they're mostly scared to death! This second shell ought to do it."

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He steadied the pistol on his knees and aimed at the second canoe, swooping down on them, the cannibals yelling and discharging flights of arrows into the night. Again the blinding white flash and the terrific report. The curator had aimed it so as not to hit the canoe directly, and they saw a wave rise in front of her which engulfed the canoe and put her crew powerless in the water.

But the others came right on, regardless. "Paddle, boys! Make it quick and snappy! They're closing in on us! Once more ought to knock the fight out of them!" He reloaded hurriedly and fired at the third canoe, the shell exploding in midair right over it. The shouts from five canoefuls of bloodthirsty cannibals surrounding them, foaming up the water with their furious paddles, filled the night with pandemonium. Their situation looked desperate now, for the Outanatas seemed determined upon their recapture and they had lost some of their fear of the curator's shells.

"Fire, boys! for all you're worth—I'll give you light!" he yelled, whipping out his flashlight. "Hold it, Baderoon!" he ordered, as the rays from its parabolic reflector shot over the water.

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The automatics began to bark, while the negro crouched behind the gunwales, shivering with fear, yet holding the light steadily on two war canoes bunched close together. The curator aimed a short-range shell right over them, hoping to founder the remaining canoes. The fearful concussion of the T. N. T. knocked their own party sprawling, and, where there had been two canoes, now there was a boiling geyser of water in which they rose like tossed logs, their crews tumbling headlong through the white glare. It proved too much for the remaining three canoes. The flashlight showed them turning tail and paddling away in frantic haste.

"Travel, Nigger, Travel!—that's what T. N. T. means!" whooped the curator. "Paddle, boys, after 'em—*hard!* I'm going to put the fear of God into these people!"

He aimed the air gun at a high arc, and the shell whistled on its way. High over the three canoes it exploded, with the strength of giant-powder fireworks. Under its glare they could see the paddlers knocked hurtling with the concussion.

Baderoon laughed uproariously. " *Yow-yowri!* Prenty debbil-debbil, *Orang-kaya!* Make'm thunder—*Boom! Boom!*"

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"Threw a good scare into 'em! That's the ticket!" grinned the curator. "They'll swim ashore pretty well gentled, I'm thinking!—Keep after 'em, boys, as hard as you can make her go! They're gaining on us!"

He raised the air gun to its utmost elevation and the tiny streak of fire of the fuse rose in a high arc. It fell into the bay ahead of the three canoes, and there was a muffled thud which blew the whole bottom out of the bay. A white avalanche of water came roaring toward the three canoes and their bows rose dizzily and then the sterns flipped high in the air. A babel of yells and shouts told of one canoe upset, and then they steadied their own to meet the onrushing wave. It rocked giddily, like a bark canoe in a boiling rapids, and water slapped over her sides in a deluge, but her deep keel held her upright.

"Bail, Dwight—and you, too, Baderoon!" ordered the curator. "Nicky, you and Sadok keep on paddling. Don't kill yourselves, as we're out of range of them now. I'm going up to that village and lay down the law to that whole tribe! They'll let white men alone, after that."

They followed slowly in the wake of the two fleeing canoes, and finally lay floating

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idly about a mile out in front of the village. The canoes that had gone across the lagoon and those from upstream had now returned, as they could see by the assembling flares at the landing. Howlings and constant booming of drums came over the water. They dozed on the thwarts, letting the canoe drift and waiting for dawn. The noise on shore kept up throughout the night, but, after an interminable wait, a faint paling in the east, which swiftly grew to daylight over the calm waters of the lagoon, set them to paddling slowly toward the shore again.

As they drew near it was full daylight and the clouds overhead were already aflame with the rising sun. The curator loaded his airgun and stood up in the bow as they approached the landing. A deathlike silence reigned throughout the jungle. The long black canoes lay hauled up in rows, deserted, and not a sign of life appeared in the huts nor in the glades under the coco palms.

As their bow grated on the beach, the curator took careful aim at the largest of the huts and fired. The jungle shook with the sharp detonation as the building was torn asunder in crackling walls of bamboo and rattan which immediately took fire. Runnings

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and scamperings in the forest—and then all was silent as the grave again.

They stepped ashore in a compact little party, the boys with ready pistols, Sadok's long sumpitan sweeping every glade for a mark. The curator walked to the center of the clearing and swept the surrounding forest with his arm.

“Pigs!” he pronounced, in the Arfak dialect, waving his arm around comprehensively.

There were rustlings in the jungle, but no native dared show himself.

“Tell them, Baderoon, that white men are peaceful—when let alone. Also, that the white man will not harm any chief if he will step out and talk.”

Baderoon raised his voice, translating the curator's message. Absolute silence brooded in the jungle.

“Tell them,” said the curator, and his voice rang like iron, “that the white man would be friends. But if they do not make a talk at once he will bring down his thunders and lightnings and utterly destroy this village, their canoes, and their cocoanut palms. I have spoken it.”

Baderoon translated, and at this a grizzled old sinner with a white mop of woolly

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hair stepped out trembling from behind a tree.

“If the White Thunderer will only deign not to utterly destroy *us*!” he croaked, shaking all over as Baderoon translated.

“Ye shall call your old men to tow-tow; and ye shall send runners to every village, far and near, lest the thunders descend on them also!” declared the curator, sternly.

“It is agreed,” said the old man, finally, with shaking voice. “Only let the white man not harm us further! Many warriors and many canoes come not back because of him!”

He called into the forest and three other old men came unwillingly forth. They advanced, unarmed, to the edge of the clearing, stooping down and pouring sand on their heads in token of abject submission, but that was as far as they could be coaxed to come.

“It is well,” called the curator, at length, for he had no wish to risk any undue familiarity with them. “Shoot something, Sadok. I want them to fear you, too.”

Sadok looked around for a mark, and his eyes lit on a wandering pig under one of the huts. He poised his sumpitan and the dart flew out of its muzzle. The pig squealed

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and twitched his tail, and then went on rooting. In another moment he sighed and laid over, dead.

A shiver and a rustling of leaves ran through the underbrush.

“Ye have seen the silent death, also,” said Baderoon, raising his voice at the curator’s prompting. “Do not eat the pig; it is taboo.”

One of the old men took off his boars’ tusk breastplate and stepped forward and laid it on the ground. He testified that it was a present. At a sign from the curator Baderoon fetched it. The scientist examined it curiously. The white tusks were laid in rows, one atop the other, and their ends were bound with fiber network, thickly ornamented with polished red beads. The curator started with astonishment as he looked closely at them.

“Ask him where they get those red beads, Baderoon.”

There was some talk and waving of arms, and then Baderoon turned to the curator. “Him get’m big mountain—down there,” he said, pointing to the south. “Mus’ fight litty hill men for him. Prenty too-much trophy.”

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“Tell him the white man is pleased, and will give a present, too.”

The curator undid his red-silk bandanna, and Baderoon bore it over ceremoniously and laid it before the chief. The latter grinned, for the first time, and they could see that he was dying to handle it. He nodded at the curator with beaming eyes and made the pantomime of rubbing noses.

“Nothing doing!” snorted the curator. “That’s where the earlier explorers all lose out! The natives soon find out we’re ordinary, vulnerable human beings, if you let them get too familiar. Tell him, Baderoon, that the white man says to start his runners at once, and never to touch another white man so long as he lives! Farewell!”

He turned to go as Baderoon translated. They walked back to the canoes and picked out a small one, more easy to handle. Shoving off, they paddled down the lagoon, the curator sitting silently in the stern, for he knew that curious eyes were watching him from the jungle. A repressed eagerness shone in his own as he still examined curiously the boars’-tusk breastplate in his hands.

“Well—I guess that ’ll hold ’em for a time —eh, boys?” he smiled, raising his eyes from

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it at length when they had left the village landing far behind. "And—I may have something important to tell you after we reach camp!"

"Some weapon, that air pistol of yours, sir!" said Nicky, admiringly. "How did you ever get such an idea?"

"Oh, that was just a hang-over from the Western Front," replied the curator. "I've been through any number of trench scrimmages, and I learned that it's not the iron casing of grenades that does the most mischief, but the gas itself. It has far more rending power than that cast-iron shell of the grenade. Remember our old air guns of boyhood? Well, I sent some sketches to the factory and had them make me this pistol on the same lines. These light nickel shells of T. N. T. turned out to be as good as heavy grenades when I tested them. All that is needed is something to throw them with accuracy, so I had this gun made and a lot of shells, timed for eighty, fifty, and thirty yards—which is about as close as you can be to them with any safety. That's all there is to it. Beats the old dynamite stick that they used to use on the savages of the South Seas all hollow, I'll say!"

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They passed the floating wreckage of the night before as he spoke, and everyone set to work picking up paddles, spears, and arrows, the latter sticking up out of water, point down, like buoys. Then the curator made a grab and hauled aboard a floating shield. It was of the same long, oval type that the war party had carried the day before, and he examined the red paint in the carving minutely with his magnifying glass.

"It's the same mineral we found in Aru, Dwight," he declared, after a close scrutiny. "Wait till we get to camp; I've got a fine young idea hatching."

That was all they could get out of him, but the paddles swept on more tirelessly than ever, for both boys were consumed with curiosity over the new mineral.

At length they came to their own headland, with the frowning ramparts of the mountains looming back of them endlessly to the south. Here was the mouth of their creek, and up it they drove the canoe under the green arches of the jungle. After a time it came out at the old coral bank, and the abandoned sail proa showed up ahead, its bow still on the little beach. Sadok and Baderoon jumped ashore and set about getting their fire started,

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while the boys dove for their provision sacks, for they had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours and were famished.

But the curator could not wait. He cut off a sliver from the red mineral paint in the shield scrolls and scraped a portion of it into a small test tube which he got out of his mess kit. Filling it with a little water, he went over to Nicky's alcohol flame and brought it to a boil. Then he opened a tiny bottle of acid and dropped a tear of it into the test tube.

"Gad! boys!" he whooped. "What do you think of *that*?" he cried, holding up the tube, now filled with a cloudy yellow precipitate. "Remember that red stone we got in the channels of Aru, Dwight? Well, this is the same mineral, *cinnabar*, red oxide of mercury, boys! If there's a mountain of it, as these natives tell us, back in the hills, we've *got* to find it, for, once it is reported, it will change the whole history of this part of New Guinea. The stuff is worth its weight in gold!"

"Three cheers for Exploration!" mumbled Nicky, his mouth stuffed with food. "Have some, Professor!"

VII

CASSOWARY CAMP

“**B**ADEROON, how call-him that place chief-fellah get red paint?” asked the curator, turning to Baderoon from the test tube in his hand.

“Red Mountain!” said Baderoon, promptly.

“Good Lord!” ejaculated the curator. “There can’t be a whole mountain of cinnabar, you know! Why, you could buy out the United States Treasury with it! Might be a stratum of it—but, no; ‘*Red*’ Mountain! If there’s enough of the ore in sight to give it that name, it’s something we’ve got to see and report. Everything else is insignificant compared to this, boys!” he exulted. “I discovered a mountain once, in Mexico, near the top of which was a thick vein of cinnabar. Some day they’ll run a railroad in there and get it out, it’s so valuable. But a whole mountain of it, and right handy to the sea! Why, man, it ’ll make Holland the queen of

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the world again! Think how the world's mercury is hoarded, for making fulminate, for every primer and every shell fuse that is shot!" he went on, excitedly. "Think of the explosives possible, with unlimited supplies of mercury. T. N. T. isn't in it, compared with some of the fulminates! The Japs won the Russian war with their new camphor shell, but their supply of camphor is limited. Some day there will be a big war over Red Mountain, take it from me!"

"'Ray for Exploration!" crowed Dwight. "Come on, Mr. Baldwin; here's some nice wallaby steak!"

The curator grinned as he came back to earth and bit into the succulent meat. "Just the same, boys, we're going to see that mountain, or die in the attempt. The only thing that worries me is how to handle the pygmies. It's right in their country, and we'll have to wade through them to get there. They were peaceable enough with the English expedition, but that was only because they were afraid to start anything. They're always at war with the Papuans, and there's a sort of no-man's land between the jungle and the foothills which cannot be crossed by either side without a fight. However, the first

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thing for us to do is to jerk the rest of this wallaby meat and each man carry along a bag of pemmican made of it."

They erected a pole jerky frame that afternoon, and started a small drying fire under it, with long strips of the meat hanging in rows from the poles. Under the hot tropical sun the drying process went on apace, and soon the strips had become hard sticks of meat, greasy to the touch, hard and fibrous as wood. Steadily, also, the collections grew larger, box after box being filled with Dwight's insects, Nicky's reptiles, and the curator's birds, while their big tin of bird skins was filled up and sealed. This main collection was to be a representative one of the whole region, after which only the rarer specimens need be sought for. On the third day the crate of collections boxes was cached, well hidden in a coral cave dug in the thickets.

Meanwhile Sadok set about replenishing his supply of poisoned arrows, as his quiver of them had run low. He cut a quantity of the long thorns of the sago palm, and near the bottom of each he lashed a little cone of the corklike bark, so that it would just fit in the bore of the sumpitan, which was about three eighths of an inch in diameter. For

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poisoning the points he had a supply of the gummy juice of the upas tree, brought from Borneo and carefully kept in a small bamboo bottle which hung on his belt.

Sadok was groused. A faint but noise-some odor came from somewhere in the jungle, where his three heads were drying, but here, look you, had been two fights with the Outanatas since, and never a head for his personal collection! He was comforted, however, by the curator telling him that the upas vine, or some other representative of the strychnine family, grew in New Guinea, also, and that there would be plenty of ructions before he ever saw Borneo again.

Their stay at this camp had given them not only a fair idea of the general features of the country, but of the weather as well. Under the west monsoon, its daily changes were as regular as clockwork. A fine cool dawn, followed by several hours of misty and clearing weather when it was good to be up and doing; then the heat of midday, when even the jungle people knew enough to take a siesta; and then, about four o'clock, a tropical thunderstorm of the utmost violence, lasting until eight at night, when the sky cleared off. They soon learned to plan

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their day according to these weather changes, and at length the party broke camp for the long trek into the mountains. They followed much the same trail as before, to the table-lands along the mountain flank, and stopped for lunch on the pebbly site of their capture by the war party of the Outanatas of the week before.

But with what different feelings now! Then the fear of the unknown, the dread of meeting cannibal savages who would surely regard them as but strangers to be killed and eaten at sight. Now a feeling of confidence replaced all that. They had established the superiority of the white man in all that region, the respect in the native mind that is based only on superior force. Not even a native runner had dared show his face since that punitive expedition of the curator's. They even felt confident to hunt singly, not too far from the main party. While the others were settling down for the noonday siesta in the heat of midday, Dwight spied a flash of brilliant orange in the greens of the jungle across the creek, and set out alone after the bird, shotgun in hand. The orange spot flew off into the jungle as he drew near it, but Dwight had caught a

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glimpse of black-velvet plumage, and that flaming fire of orange on the throat, which made him tingle all over with the thrill that it *might* be the exceedingly rare six-shafted bird of paradise! He followed on through the jungle, his eyes fixed on that small dot of black perched far ahead, high in the tree tops. Moving as cautiously as he could, he worked through the festooned creepers and the huge boles of giant jungle trees toward his prize. But to his chagrin, it flew off again, just as he was about to try the spiteful little twenty-gauge at long range.

The boy's eyes followed the bird avidly. To bring back a six-shafted! Why, all this expedition had been for just such a prize as this! Nothing is known of this bird save what can be conjectured from the few skins now in the world's museums. To add one more to that meager collection, each specimen with who knows what story of adventure and privation behind it, seemed to Dwight a corking enterprise. Using all the woodcraft he possessed, he worked silently through the jungle. Experience had taught him to look ahead for a place to plant each footstep, not only to be sure that one did not step on a snake, but also to insure the

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foot coming down in position to fire instantly. With gun muzzle up, he advanced carefully, praying earnestly that his quarry might linger just a few minutes more.

Again the paradise bird fluttered off, and this time Dwight had but a line on where he had gone, for the last glimpse of him disappeared through the jungle, far off through the tree trunks. He groaned with disappointment, but he was not the boy to give up while there was a ghost of a chance left. Fixing on a tall *Erythrina* as the last tree past which the bird had soared, he set out as fast as possible. In perhaps half an hour he reached the tree, and, taking the range, set out again, his eyes scrutinizing the leafy foliage of the jungle roof. He had about begun to lose hope now, and, moreover, to realize that he was totally lost in the jungle, far from his companions, when a flutter of wings some distance ahead showed him his siren bird, flitting about and feeding on clusters of blue tropical berries that hung in the foliage of a high tree top that loomed up ahead.

Dwight heaved a sigh of relief. The bird would surely stay there, feeding, and he had plenty of time for a careful stalk. He

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wormed through the jungle, and at last arrived where an aim could be had, at not more than forty yards. Raising the gun carefully, he fired, and down came his prize, at last!

It was with a sort of breathless wonder that Dwight looked over the six-shafted bird of paradise as he lifted it gently out of the dense undergrowth in which it had fallen. *Why* did nature lavish such abundant beauty on a bird destined never to be seen by eyes that could appreciate it? Human eyes, that is, for, of course, the bird would be forever a delight to the eyes of that dull-colored little mate of his whose protection demanded something less gorgeously visible. It made him feel how insignificant is man in nature's world. Man, the animal, as exhibited by the naked savages who inhabited this forest was Nature's own child; assuredly this bird was not so decorated to please him! Man, the intellectual, civilized man, could feel a thrill of rapture over this creature of Nature's, admire its intense golden-orange throat scales, its rich, velvety, purple-black plumage, its crown of vivid emerald and topaz colors, with the long wire-haired plumes springing back like a coronet from its head; but Nature

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cared nothing for intellectual man and his mind, which was not of her doing, and she certainly did not make this bird for him! In fact, we are each one of us two people, Dwight philosophized, amusing himself with these fancies as he examined the paradise bird in his hand—man the animal, the creature of Nature, living very like the animals themselves and dependent on her, like them; and man, the intellectual, a creature of a power that is above Nature, the Being from whom sprang art, religion, philosophy, science, all the things that are above Nature and essentially antagonistic to her. But in the end Nature always has her revenge, for her jungles reclaim proud cities, as in India and Central America, or her deserts isolate them, as Athens and the Parthenon, or her sands bury them, like Egypt and the Sphinx.

“All that sermon from one small tropical bird!” laughed Dwight to himself, carelessly, as his thoughts came back to earth again. “Nature may be irreconcilably hostile to us—but, where am I now, and how am I going to get out? That’s the real question for *this man!*”

He had no idea how or where his wander-

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ings in pursuit of the paradise bird had taken him. All that was certain was that he had not crossed the creek again, and that he was somewhere east of it. He laid a course west with the compass, and set out, confident that he would sooner or later strike the stream.

But Nature proceeded to show him how utterly insignificant to her is man. The first indication of it was a large plop of her tropical rain which fell on his helmet. Dwight looked up, surprised to see the sky overcast and the thunders of the daily afternoon tropical storm muttering in the mountains. He must have been several hours following this six-shaft! He hurried on back toward the creek, stumbling through the jungle and striving to stifle panicky impulses to run. It was essential to keep his head, and to pick out landmark trees, methodically, ahead on his course, for you cannot steer yourself like a ship with the compass in the jungle. He forced his attention upon this, ignoring the raindrops, the steady patter of which kept up in the tree tops. The wetted under-growth soon soaked his thin khaki. He now bitterly regretted setting out without his pack. Just a moment to have shouldered it would have been enough, but he had been

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too eager, too afraid to lose sight of his precious prize.

A distant roar of wind, and an angry cannonade of thunder came from the west, setting the jungle to rocking and tossing overhead, while birds flew wildly through the tree tops, croaking and screeching harshly. Dwight stopped and listened to it. He was trembling all over with the wet cold, and sharp chills were running through him. Now or never was the time for a signal, for no sound would carry far after the rain came. He raised his gun, fired both barrels, and listened with all his ears.

No answer, save the roar of the rain, sounding louder and louder and coming nearer and nearer. He looked about for the largest tree near him and ran for it. The branches of wind-lashed forest were now parting overhead, and out of the dark gray came vivid flashes of lightning which filled the jungle with winking light. The long ropes of creepers which climbed up to the branches of his tree from the jungle floor swung solemnly in the wind, and Dwight crept under them and huddled close against the trunk, cowering in the buttresses of the great roots.

Then came the rain, in furious white sheets

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that filled the forest with a flying haze. It soaked him instantly to the skin, while peal after peal of thunder went off like cannon shots. An ungovernable terror seized the boy—the fury of the wind-driven rain, the loneliness, the crashing and riving of limbs and branches—and he lifted up his voice in one last, despairing yell with every ounce of lung power that he possessed.

There was no answer—save a low, sibilant hiss, which sounded through the lowering gloom, close at hand, whispering sharp and clear in his ears above the noise of the storm! Dwight, startled with a shiver of fright, looked up, to perceive that one of the great vines overhead was *not* a creeper, but a huge python, lowering himself steadily, his neck crooked, and his head drawn back to strike at him! His gun flashed to shoulder, and both barrels went off blindly as the boy's nerves collapsed with the shock of horror and he sank down in a shivering heap. He had a dim feeling of yards and yards of snake tumbling down through the vines beside him, but he seemed not to care about it at all, for it was comfortable down here between these roots . . . if he could only find a place for his head . . .

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When he came to it was pitch dark and the storm had gone on. A scampering of jungle rats made off through the black as Dwight moved his cramped limbs wearily, to find them aching all over and his face hot and flushed with fever, while violent chills kept running upward through his body.

He peered about him, bewildered; then conscious ideas began to pelt in upon him.

"F-f-fire! Quick-ick as I can m-make one!" he chattered to himself, fumbling for his pocket flasher. Its small but brilliant light lit up the jungle, causing many an outcry of night birds and a scurrying over the forest floor of land crabs and small marsupials. It also revealed the tumbled heap of the python lying beside him, its neck shot in two and parts of its reticulated length already gnawed by rodents. He glanced at it casually; to get wood that would burn was the real worry now! the jungle was black as a pocket, and a wan mist hung through it. After one flash of the light on those miasmas, drifting like pale death through the trees, Dwight hurriedly got out his medicine kit and swallowed some quinine. Then he sought kindlings in the underbrush, breaking twigs here and there, but they were all

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sodden and moldy. He felt sick all over and burning with fever, and he wanted to lie down again and sleep forever; but it was most imperative to stay alive, so he started off through the jungle in search of firewood, stumbling westward by compass, until a great tangle of vines ahead of him told of a prone dead tree.

His spirits rose as his eye lit on it, and he pushed his way under the great bole with ready shotgun, for he could not tell how many jungle dwellers might have camped under it during the storm. A grand scampering and creeping rustled the dry leaves under the trunk, but it soon stopped and the flashlight showed the cavelike space all clear. Dwight shouldered his way into it, and at once cleared a space for a fire and began peeling off strips of dry bark from the under side of the tree. Blessed, blessed fire! The one human thing in all this dark jungle! That was the turning point in his mental distress, for dejection gave way to cheerfulness, wandering homelessness to a hearth and a campfire. Soon the warmth of its small blaze penetrated even his chilled bones, and it and the quinine gradually drove off his fever. Dwight waited out the night

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under the trunk, trying the cave man's posture of sleep, squatting on his hams with his head resting on arms crossed over his knees (still used by the hill men of India and by many tribes of the Malay Archipelago). He found it not so bad, even though irksome to a white man's heel tendon. Keeping the fire going with bark and small branches broken from the tree trunk, he gradually dried out, and at length there came the dawn of another day and the jungle awoke to life.

Starting off by compass again, he steered due west, bound in time to strike the brook. It was not for an hour more of traveling that the jungle began to lighten on ahead, and bits of sky, glimpses of mountain side, and the tops of low trees told him he was coming to where the brook skirted the plateau. Dense, thorny underbrush began to block his way now, and beyond it came the rippling murmur of the stream. He shouted for the curator and his party, hoping that he was near enough to camp for his voice to be heard. No answer came, except the sough of the wind over the grasses and bushes of the plateau, so Dwight decided to get out into the open and study the mountains for

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something familiar. He forced his way to the stream side and jumped across.

He discovered, from the familiar headlands of the mountain chain, that he was some distance above camp. It seemed well to fire another signal in the open, and he was about to do so when three large birds as big as ostriches jumped from the grass in the swales and began to run, making a scraping, cackling noise something like the wild brush-turkey.

“Cassowaries!” exclaimed Dwight, thrilling with adventure again as his gun sprang to shoulder. They were running like deer, their red, wattled heads and bright-blue necks stretched out ahead like giant chickens. His shotgun held only sixes, so Dwight aimed for the speeding head of the nearest cassowary as at a flying quail, swinging ahead and firing like a wing shot.

The cassowary went down, while the other two flapped off in a wild burst of speed, using their wings to aid their legs. Dwight rushed out, intending to finish off his bird with the knife, as he did not wish to injure the skin of the specimen with a close-up shot. The great bird lay in the grass as he came up, its fiery eye looking at him, unconquered,

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like a rooster that has been worsted in a fight. As he rushed up it flew at him, squawking discordantly. Dwight beat him off with the barrels of his gun. The air seemed full of the great black wings of his adversary, blinding him with blows of the coarse, double-quilled pinions. It never occurred to him that a cassowary could be really dangerous, and he laughed confidently as the heavy bird fell to the ground and prepared to spring again. With the second leap its long blue neck lunged out and its blunt bill caught his shirt collar and held on like a snapping turtle, while its stout legs drummed fiercely on his chest. Dwight felt the canvas of his coat being ripped, and then a sharp pain seared down his breast to the belt like a hot iron. He was now fighting off the cassowary desperately, stabbing blindly, and warding off the blows of the wings on his head with his left arm. The tearing and rending of its legs on his chest kept up with increasing violence, and he was forced to bring his elbows in close to protect his stomach, dropping his knife and grabbing with his hands at the stout feet of the cassowary—anything to prevent being disemboweled!

Then a shiver went through the bird, its



THEN A SHIVER WENT THROUGH THE BIRD, ITS EYES FLUTTERED
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eyes fluttered closed, and the grip of its bill loosened, while the boy tugged himself free. He jumped for his knife in a battling rage, intending to close in and finish his adversary, who was now kicking feebly, when he heard a shout, and turned to see Sadok and the curator come running across the swales. A sumpitan dart sticking in the bird's side told all!

"Did he hurt you?" yelled the curator, sprinting toward him. "Don't ever go near a wounded cassowary, you darn fool!" he exploded, wrathfully, as he came up. "Don't you know they're more dangerous than a kangaroo? Look!"

He stooped and held up the bird's claw. On the inside toe was a long hooked talon, curved and sharp as a tiger's claw.

"Did he get you with it?" demanded the curator, looking at him anxiously, for Dwight still stood looking at him, speechless, holding to his chest with his left hand.

"Guess he did!" gasped the boy, swaying weakly. He lifted his hand and his fingers ran red with blood.

"Catch him, Sadok!" warned the curator as his own hand dove for the first aid in his hip pocket. Dwight leaned against Sadok's

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strong shoulder, while the curator opened his shirt and examined the wound hastily. Two long gashes in his chest bled rather freely, but nothing serious had been cut.

"Lucky for you, son! He'd have ripped you open just as nice! Lot's of new-chums have been killed that way!" said the curator, cheerfully.

"Lie down awhile; you'll feel better presently," he ordered, for Dwight was white as a sheet. "But, congratulations, boy, first of all, on your getting back to us! I had not time to say so, you know, in the excitement of this ruction," he apologized. "We'll have to hunt in pairs in the future. Where have you been, Dwight, and why did you stay out all night?"

"It was worth it!" smiled the boy, feebly, and he dug into his coat pocket and brought out the six-shafted bird of paradise, carefully swathed in his handkerchief.

The curator undid the fastenings; then a whoop of joy escaped him.

"Boy!" he beamed, reaching forward to shake Dwight's hand again. "It sure *was* worth it! Man, it's the big prize of the expedition—so far!"

He and Sadok then fired shots and called

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until they brought Nicky and Baderoon out of the jungle. Nicky came up on the run.

"Where's Dwight? What's happened?" he cried, anxiously; then, catching sight of Dwight: "You—old—hatrack!" he burbled, flinging himself affectionately on his chum. "Say, the whole camp was worrying about you and firing guns, last night! Get lost in the jungle?"

"Nope. He got—this!" cut in the curator, holding up the flaming glories of the paradise bird for Nicky to admire. "And then—a cassowary tried to scrape an acquaintance with him, so to speak!" He laughed, pointing out the huge bird lying in the grass, with Sadok working over his skin.

"And, b'lieve me, your li'l' old dart got there just in time!" chirped Dwight from the grass. "Shake, Sadok!"

"Make a stretcher out of a couple of coats and two poles, boys!" ordered the curator, energetically, as Sadok finished the cassowary skin with a grunt of satisfaction. "We four 'll tote him to camp. How about Camp Cassowary for a name for this stop, hey, boys?"

VIII

PYGMY LAND

“THIS is not an expedition—it’s getting to be a hospital!” exclaimed the curator, whimsically, as Dwight was tucked away under his own tent fly. “Baderoon’s arm is still game, and Dwight will be at least three days getting healed up—yet. Did you ever see such glorious country to move about in, or such wonderful weather?”

Nicky agreed with him. He had collected in British Guiana and the West Indies, yet this was the first time he had been free of the eternal green maze of the deep jungle. Up here, high on the mountain flanks, it was hot and dry, and the vegetation was more like the open African veldt. Across the creek, to the east, and down into the lowlands, swept the damp jungle; back of camp, to the west, rose the mountain sides, inviting them irresistibly to climb up and see what might be seen from their tops.

Dwight’s adventure with the cassowary

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had upset their plans badly. There was no telling how soon he could move, for wounds in the tropics have an aggravating way of infecting and becoming obstinate about healing. The curator chafed over the delay, scarce daring to hope that the dry, breezy climate of the mountains would bring a swift closing of the scratches of the cassowary's claw. He considered, meanwhile, the advisability of setting out with Nicky on a scouting tour, leaving Sadok and Baderoon to guard the camp. He finally decided to risk a day's absence.

"Dwight," said he, coming over to the boy's tent after making up his mind, "Nicky and I are going to climb this mountain back of us, and do some mapping and exploring from its top. We'll be gone all day, and possibly the night, too. It's taking a chance, to break up our party this way, I know, but half our time has already gone by since the proa left, and we must be up and doing. I'm leaving you the most deadly weapon I've got." He pulled out a bright, shiny, nickel bomb from a flap case on his belt. It seemed very light and fragile to Dwight as he handled it.

"I call it the 'explorer's bomb,'" said the

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curator. "It's filled with H. E. explosive. To arm it you bend this little copper projection over until it breaks off and you hear a hiss. Then throw it for all you're worth and run! If a war party comes up, and they won't keep their distance or act hostile, throw it among them, and then you and the others bolt for cover. He unbelted the bomb's carrying case, and Dwight replaced the missile in it gingerly. "You won't have to use it, I'm sure," said the curator, confidently. "Between the *lakatoi* and the canoe fight we've got a reputation for being best left alone, in this region, I'm thinking."

He and Nicky set off early next morning. They went straight up the mountain side through the thick and thorny jungle. The geological formation was of comparatively recent lava rock, and the regular slope signified that an old extinct volcano crater formed its top, no doubt long since filled up and overgrown. As they climbed steadily higher, and wider and wider vistas of the country came to view, this impression was confirmed. High up on the slopes a regular talus of broken lava rock from some former eruption barred their way. The boulders were of all sizes and their crevices and sunny

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flats held many a snake, so that Nicky, as "snakologist" of the expedition, felt constrained to cut a snake stick and go after them.

The curator lit his pipe and sat down to spy out the country, meanwhile, with his glasses. Presently Nicky passed him, carrying a long stick of lignum-vitæ with a length of string tied to its top. Just under it he had nailed a staple with the string looped through it. Nicky stalked along, jumping from rock to rock, his eyes intent below him. Presently he made a quick jab with the stick, pulled tight on the string, and then bore aloft a squirming red-and-black serpent, vainly winding itself around the end of the stick, while its head struck futilely at the empty air.

"*Elaterus wallacei*—deadly poisonous," announced Nicky, scientifically, holding up the creature for the curator to admire. "Isn't he a beauty?"

"Handsome!" agreed the curator, laughingly. "Not *quite* so near, Nick—and I hope you've got tight hold of that string!"

"Sure! Watch me make a specimen of him!" said the enthusiast, picking up a small club. He held the end of the snake stick

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down on a rock, where a few judgmatrical raps reduced his captive to a scientific curiosity.

Nicky dropped him in a small canvas bag which was pretty sure to have a few lizards and frogs and turtles in it, also, at any given time of day, and they set out upward again. A wide belt of century plants barred their way as they climbed higher. They grew in rank profusion, the great green leaves crossing in every direction, six feet high, and all armed with a dagger point at the tip and saw teeth along the blades. A man's eyes would be worth nothing if he once got himself well into them.

A detour of about a mile brought them around the century plants, and then came lava escarpments, steep and difficult to climb. Up them they swarmed, and found themselves on a gradually rising, arid table-land with sparse vegetation growing all about, and magnificent views out in every direction.

Working southward, they finally came out on a bald knob that the curator had noted from the camp below and had determined to reach. Here the view was superb, wonderful—when you came to consider that all you looked at below was new and unmapped

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country. The curator's pocket aneroid gave their height at a little over six thousand feet. Far over to the east could be made out the dim outlines of Geelvink Bay, with the limitless Pacific behind it. Below them, to the west, the slopes ran down sharply to the mangrove swamps that lined the shores fronting on the Banda Sea, with the long point of Cape Debelle jutting out as if on a small relief map directly below them. Beyond it, far over the sea, a bank of clouds on the horizon told them of Aru, a hundred miles away.

But it was to the south that their eyes turned with the most inquiring interest. Here the ranges rose higher and higher, under heavy banks of clouds, until, on the extreme horizon, the sun glinted on a white, snowy sea of mountains, jagged with peaks and caps, with Carstensz (17,000 feet) just visible as a tiny jutting point of white. Two hundred years ago Jan Carstensz, navigating along these shores, caught a glimpse of the Snow Mountains from the decks of his vessel and reported them in the ship's log. It was such a rare glimpse, behind the eternal veil of clouds that shrouds the interior of New Guinea, that no one believed him. From

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that day to this, a lifting of the jungle clouds hanging low over the mountains, and the white man present to see them, have never come at the same time, so that even the existence of the high fellows in the interior has been regarded as a wild tale of Jan Carstensz. It was not for more than two centuries later, in 1911, that Jan Lorentz, another intrepid Hollander, with a party of twenty Dyaks, made a dash through the pygmy country and ascended the first one of the Snow Mountains, naming it Mt. Wilhelmina in honor of the Dutch queen.

From their own knob another wonderful feature of the country could also be seen, extending southward in a long flat perspective—the Great Precipice. For two hundred miles this precipice extends like a rampart, dividing the mountains from the flat jungle. It rises sometimes to a sheer height of ten thousand feet, undoubtedly the grandest precipice in the world. Sloping up to it, they could make out the jungle-clad talus, and beyond that the lowlands of the river country, widening out more and more as the coast land flowed southward. Dozens of rivers, they knew, cut through this jungle, out of sight in the green sea of foliage, and here was

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the scene of the English expedition, their party arriving full of hope and confidence, only to be baffled by the precipice and the swift floods of the rivers from getting farther than the foothills of the Snow Mountains. Here they had discovered the race of pygmies, and had visited one of their villages, collected implements of war and domestic usage, and, most valuable of all, a list of some fourteen words in their tongue, now carefully preserved for future use in the curator's notebook.

"Nicky," said the curator, after a long and careful examination of a spot on the jungly hills to the south of them, "I wish you would take a look at that scar over yonder, where a sort of ravine seems to run down the second mountain to the south of us. My eyes may be deceiving me, but—" He handed over the glasses.

Nicky looked eagerly, with his fresh young eyes glued to the binoculars.

"Huts! Little huts, 'way up in the tree tops! I'm sure of it!" he cried, after a careful scrutiny.

"I knew it!" said the curator, quietly. "Those huts up in the tree tops are where the unmarried girls of the pygmy tribes sleep.

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That marks it as a pygmy village. See if you can't make out larger huts on the ground."

Nicky studied the jungle awhile, with intense concentration. "I see them," he cried, handing the curator the glasses. "The small huts are built up in bare pandanus trees, and under the palms and bamboos around them I can see a brown shape like a bear's back—that's a thatched hut."

Baldwin agreed with him, after a look for himself. Together they planned a route to reach the village in about two days' march.

"Say, Mr. Baldwin, that war party of the Outanatas was on its way for a fight with *them*, when they came upon us—that's my hunch!" declared Nicky, with sudden conviction.

"No doubt! There's probably more or less of an old trail, if we look for it. And now for some plane-table surveys, Nicky."

The curator unfolded a large blank sheet among the rear pages of his notebook, and on it drew a rough map of the country, with Nicky to help with comment and suggestion. Then out of his mess kit he took a flat, round brass box, which turned out to be a compass with folding sight bars. With this compass, bearing sights were taken of all the promi-

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nent peaks and hills in sight, and the map was then corrected to agree with the bearings.

Then the curator indicated a tall banyan tree growing on the end of a spur of the mountain opposite to them to the south.

“See that tree, Nick?” he asked. “We’ll climb up there to-morrow, and take all these bearings again from that point. Where they intersect these we have taken from here will be the true positions of all these interior peaks and valleys on our maps. That’s the way we make an accurate plane-table survey.”

“How about the distance from here to the banyan tree as a base line?” objected Nicky. “How ’ll we lay that out on the map? We don’t know it.”

“We’ll measure it, son. We’ll lay off a base line down in those open swales where the cassowary got his Dwight, so to speak, and we’ll sight this knob and the banyan tree, both, from below. With a known base, and the two triangles erected on it by bearing angles, it’s a cinch to calculate the distance from this knob to the banyan.”

They descended the mountain to camp, finding Dwight up and about and putting around his camp, an occupation he dearly loved. Baderoon was loafing to his heart’s

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content, and Sadok had succeeded in adding a rare black cockatoo to the collections. That evening Nicky and the curator went into the open and measured off a base line. From both ends of it their mountain knob and the banyan tree on the next mountain to the south could be sighted. The compass was set up on a stake, and the bearings of both points carefully taken from each end of the base line. It was dark when they got through.

After the camp had fed for the night, the curator came over to Nicky's fly and squatted there, with his notebook spread out. He first laid off their base line in a small number of the blue-line squares on a page of the notebook. From the ends of this he drew the angles they had taken with the compass. They formed two thin, wedge-shaped triangles, slanting away from the base line in opposite directions. Counting the blue squares between the outer points of these two triangles gave the distance between the knob and the banyan tree compared with the base line, from which it was easy to figure the actual distance. Laying this out on his map, they were ready for the climb next day.

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It did not seem possible to Nicky that they could climb up a new mountain, clear up to that banyan tree, without a series of hair-raising adventures, but, strange to say, it was done! The boy began to study out this phenomenon, finally, so unusual did it seem, and he found the secret of it lay in the curator's method. He was after a plane-table survey, now, and so he let all the wild creatures alone—and they let him alone! Cassowaries and brush turkeys ran off, squawking cackles through the swales of saw grass, but the curator heeded them not. Wallabys leapt for cover, and were let go free. They passed a high pandanus with a tree kangaroo crawling in its top, but no Nicky was detailed to go up after him. Snakes of high and low degree, fascinating in the extreme to Nicky, went squirming on their ways unchased. Even a cuscus of a new kind was passed by unmolested. Nicky perceived that trouble would not hunt you, if you did not seek it, in the New Guinea jungle. In a surprisingly short time they were at the foot of the banyan tree and truing up all the points on the map with intersecting lines drawn from their position.

“Besides which, we have added a lot of stuff

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to the north which I can correct with coast surveys," concluded the curator as he folded the pocket notebook. "I reckon this map will admit me to the Royal Geographic and entitle me to a whole alphabet tacked on after my name—much that I care!" he laughed. "The thing for us to do now is to push on and visit the pygmies, and then for Cinnabar Mountain! Sorry this survey did not show it up. Must be farther on to the south."

Next day camp was broken and the whole party was on the move. Baderoon was entirely well, now, and Dwight so far healed that he and Sadok had overturned nearly every rock near camp the day before, adding hundreds of new beetles to his collection. They followed at first the old war trail of the Outanatas, and then, as it deviated away, took the route planned out by Nicky and the curator through the mountains from the knob. That night the tents were pitched on the edge of a warm, dry field of yellow grass, with coco palms and wild, small-fruited bananas crowding out into the clearing. A little stream, flowing into their old friend the creek, gave their roots the necessary water, and made a rill to camp besides. It all reminded Nicky and Dwight of some of

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their earlier Florida camps with the curator, and they felt entirely at home.

At dawn each man cooked him a breakfast, rolled up his pack, and by sunup they were on the trail again. From across the valley, a look-see by Nicky up on the hillside disclosed the pygmy village, now not half a day's march away, and they went along cautiously, guns and pistols ready and the curator's air gun loaded with a short-range shell, for they might come on a party of them unexpectedly and no one could foresee the outcome. About a mile from the village they halted, and chose an easily defended position on the mountain side. There they waited for some of the pygmies to come that way. There was a well-defined trail just below them, and they judged that it was often used. In perhaps an hour voices came along it through the jungle. A small party, of four warriors and a dog, were walking single file along the path, and at sight of the curator they all stopped with guttural exclamations of alarm.

It seemed to Dwight that he had never looked upon such villainous-looking little men. They were about four feet six inches high, the tallest not four feet nine; brownish

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black in color; and, instead of the Papuan mop of frizzled hair, their heads were nearly bald, with black chin and side whiskers, in a sort of thick mane from ear to ear. They carried bows at least a foot longer than they were tall, spears, and a net bag slung over the shoulder. Each man had also a small sack containing his fire sticks and other belongings slung about his neck. In place of the usual loin cloth, or just plain nudity, each wore a long, yellow half gourd, hung from a string around his middle and secured by a thong through the crotch.

Dwight thrilled to realize that he was looking upon the original aborigines of New Guinea. Like the Negritos of the Philippines, and our own cave men forbears, they were short, strong little men, with well-developed muscles and stout legs, and they were in a high state of hunting-tribe civilization, as shown by the decency of the gourd, the absence of barbaric ornament, and the efficient hunter's equipment that each man carried. They did not seem particularly afraid, but stood staring at the white party, arrows on bow, ready for any eventuality.

The curator grinned and, pointing at the mangy-looking dog, "*Wiwi!*" he pronounced.

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The four started with astonishment, to hear a word in their own tongue spoken by this strange-looking white man.

Then, pointing at the most clownish-looking one of the four, "*Amare-ta?*" ("His?") he asked, smiling genially.

The man was evidently the butt and good fellow of the crowd, for the shot about it being *his* dog went home. A black-whiskered old pirate, who was evidently their leader, cracked a smile and nodded his head. Then they began to chatter among themselves, excitedly. Evidently they had heard of the English expedition from their own tribes to the south. The English had treated them well, experienced as they are in handling natives.

"*Kami oro-ta?*" ("Your houses?") asked the curator, next. "Gosh! boys, I only know fourteen words of their language, but I'm working them for all they are worth!" he exclaimed in an aside to their own party.

The pygmies grinned and nodded again, dropping their arrow points in a more friendly manner. He was winning them fast.

"*Kema-u-uteri!*" said the old fellow, vigorously, pointing toward the village.

"He means they're going to give us a pig and some coconuts," explained the curator

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to his own party. "They want us to come up to the village. I guess not! We'll stay right here and see what next."

He nodded his thanks for their offer; then, "*Area-ta ku!*" ("My boat!") he said to the pygmies, waving his hand toward the lagoon down in the valleys. "*Uta doro-ta!*" he added, pointing to their camp site, the words telling them that his fire would be made there.

The four nodded and grinned as the curator signified politely that they were welcome to visit him. Then they started up the trail, with many a backward glance of curiosity.

"Now, then, boys, it's up to us to barricade this camp and make it as strong for defense as we can, until we see how everything turns out," said the curator, energetically, after they had gone.

The site was admirably chosen. A huge prone bole lay across the front of it, overlooking the trail, and it only needed stones cleared away and piled on the flanks to make a veritable fort of it, with their rear protected by the rocky ledges of the mountain. They cleared out the inclosure and then started their fire. Presently yells and shouts and an excited babel of voices came floating across

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the valley from the village. Through the glasses they could see men, women, and children crowding around the four hunters, and then there was an immense amount of running around and preparations of some sort going on in the village.

"The four were not on the war path, for they carried no bamboo knives for head hunting," ruminated the curator. "Tapiros, I suppose. Get a lot of wood for a big fire," he ordered. "We want plenty of light if they come around to-night, so we can see what we are doing."

The noise in the village redoubled, and, as night came down and the tents and hammocks were slung, it seemed that every man, woman, and child in it was coming to visit them in a mob. A singing chorus of the wild little hill men came marching toward them through the jungle paths.

"That's bad!" exclaimed the curator, anxiously. "If there was only some way we could show our power, without hurting them! We can't let a mob get to close quarters with us."

"I think I've got a scheme, sir," ventured Nicky. "There are a few flashlights in my vest-pocket camera. Suppose I run out and

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explode one in the path, about thirty yards off?"

"Well—get it ready, anyhow," hesitated the curator. "They don't seem to be hostile. Dwight and Sadok will cover you, while I will step out in front of the log and try to act like a peaceable human being."

The pygmies came on in a crowd through the dark, torches here and there shining through the bush. They did not seem to be sending out flanking parties, which was reassuring, and the main body came on down the trail. Nicky dashed out, lit the fuse of his flash, and had just gotten back to the tree when it went off. A blinding glare lit up the scene. It showed at least a hundred pygmies diving frantically for cover. The whites noted with relief that the men were decorated with flowers and carried no arms. A party bearing a pig trussed up on a pole had suddenly set down their burden and decamped.

"They're friendly!" cried the curator, relievedly. "I'd give a million dollars for the word 'friend' in Tapiro!" Instead, he put his hand over his heart and bowed his thanks for the pig, like any after-dinner orator. Sadok threw a pile of grass on the

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fire and its flames lit up the scene. The moment hung in the balance.

“Sing, boys!—something plaintive!—for God’s sake, sing!” barked the curator, hastily.

On such sudden notice Nicky could think of nothing but the old camp-fire ditty, “Sweet Adeline.” He poured it out, at the top of his voice, the others chiming in on the refrain. All over the world, in lonely camp fires from the Arctic to the Equator, that plaintive song has unburdened the hearts of hunters and explorers, as a wolf bays the moon. It did not fail them now. Where words lacked, music got across. That remote something in the plaintive chimes of “Adeline” that satisfies the white hunter had reached over into the souls of this tribe of the most ancient of all hunters. One or two old men came out, quaking, from their hiding places, the leader of the original four one of them.

“*Yow-nata-u; kema-kema!*” he quavered, indicating the pig.

“Thanks!” called out the curator, desperately. “Go get him, Sadok and Baderoon. We’ve got to do the polite. I never knew music to fail with savages yet!”

They went down and carried the pig up ceremoniously, while the curator kept on

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bowing his thanks. "Set it down in front of our tree. I've got another idea," he said, as they brought the pig up. "Put another of your flashes in front of the pig, Nicky, and touch it off."

Nicky lit the fuse, and the curator stood over the pig, making what he hoped were sufficiently impressive incantations over it. Presently the flash went off, lighting up the whole jungle with its lurid glare. In the intense darkness that followed, the pig was whisked over the log out of sight. By the time sight returned to the eyes of the little hill men it had disappeared.

"That ought to hold 'em for a bit!" said the curator, out of the corner of his mouth. "They call me *Yow-nata*, 'sun maker,' so a miracle or two won't do any harm. Got any more ideas, boys?"

"Yes, I've got a good one!" came back Dwight. "Let's have your flasher, sir, and your's, Nicky. They're both powerful. Now, then, have you got anything to give them, sir?"

"Sure! I've been saving a small bag of beads for some such affair as this," said the curator, producing them from a pocket.

"All right. You walk out there with them, and I'll do my stunt," chuckled Dwight.

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"Thank the Lord, 'bead' is one of the words the English got," said the curator, starting down to the trail.

"*Upou* [beads] *kema!* [give]" he called out, holding out a handful of them and waving it about. The old men crept forward warily. As they came close to the curator, Dwight, with the flashers held on both sides of his eyes, flashed them on. The effect was weird in the extreme. It looked as if he had two fiery eyes, and the rays lit up the curator and made the glass beads in his palm flash like jewels. There was an instant dive by the hill men into the brush again.

"*Amare upou kema!* *Amare upou kema!* [I give you beads! I give you beads!] Come out, you little devils!" he called, reassuringly, while Dwight kept the rays turned on him steadily.

It took a lot of coaxing, but finally the same old fellow ventured forth again, trying the effect of the light on himself gingerly. He jumped back as Dwight turned his face and swept the jungle, heads popping out of sight like chipmunks as his "eyes" lit up the jungle. Then the old man ventured out again as the rays returned to the curator. Foot by foot he drew near, with many a

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questioning glance, and finally the curator was able to drop a pile of beads in his hand. He grunted with pleasure, and Baldwin signed for the other to approach. He gave a small pile to each, and then walked back to the log.

"Switch 'em off, Dwight. You did fine!" he exclaimed. "Now we'll go about our affairs and let 'em watch us for the present. You keep guard, and if any of them venture too near, just turn those eyes on them and we've got 'em on the run."

The tents were put up and candles and lanterns lit, the pygmies watching every move from the jungle depths. The curator spent his time trying to talk to the old men, who had gathered in the trail below their log breastwork, and he finally attempted a few words in the hated Papuan tongue. To his surprise they knew considerable of that, too, and Baderoon was at once called to interpret. Between them a feast was arranged next day in the village, and the information conveyed that the white man would prefer that the tribe go back to their village, now, as it was time for sleep.

At this the older men gave an order (there did not seem to be any central head chief)

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and they all drifted slowly back, their voices coming faintly out of the jungle, all talking excitedly.

“And now, boys, we’ll call it a day!” said the curator. “Looks as if they were going to be friendly. Sadok, you stand watch until those stars there”—indicating the Southern Cross—“come over that mountain. Then call me.”

The camp turned in, leaving Sadok on guard by the fire.

IX

THE FIGHT AT THE CRATER

“FILL your canteens, boys!” ordered the curator, as they finished breakfast next morning, “and stow all this pig meat we can carry, for our aim will be to get through with this feast of the pygmies as soon as we can and then push on south. Every man pack his kit for marching order.”

Sadok had butchered the pig during his night watch, and he and Baderoon each had a ham ready for slinging. The camp reveled in fresh pork chops, and then cut slices of the forequarters for carrying in their pemmican sacks.

Then they set out for the pygmy village, weapons still ready in case of any treachery. All of the men of the tribe were gathered around a great fire, and a huge feast of roast brush turkey, sago-palm bread, and yams was set out, all ready to eat, but not a woman or a child was in sight.

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"That's all right," reassured the curator, as the others looked around questioningly. "The English offered the pygmies any amount of bribes for a single photograph of a woman, but they had all been moved up on the mountain and no amount of persuasion could get them to call one down. It means nothing hostile to us."

They seated themselves in the circle. The pygmy men carried no arms, but they could see weapons stacked against the trees near by, among them the thin, flat blades of the sinister bamboo knives used in head hunting. The feast went on merrily, the curator working out a system of learning pygmy words by pointing at objects and making the question sign. Speaking mixed Papuan and pygmy, a considerable conversation was being carried on. He managed to convey the idea that birds and insects were exchangeable for more of the beads, and then, finally, after a good deal of groping—

"Him want you-fellah stop prenty much time here," explained Baderoon out of the tangle of words and signs.

The curator shook his head and pointed southward, smiling. Instantly an angry look shot across the faces of the older men. They

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shook their heads vigorously, and some halting Papuan dialect followed.

"Him say taboo. Prenty debbil-debbil mountain thataway," translated Baderoon. "No good. Prenty hantus. Must go back!" He pointed north.

The curator smiled. "Yes, we will—not! We might go back and circle around them, fellows—but, no, they'll have scouts spying on us until we get out of the country, and it 'll be a jungle fight all the way to try to get past them to the south. No; we'll have it out with them now!"

"Tell them," he said, sternly, "that the *Yow-nata* is not afraid of any devil-devil, nor taboo, nor hantus."

An angry buzz greeted Baderoon's translation. The little black-bearded men shook their heads violently, and some of them began to look around for their weapons. There were at least forty in the party.

"Looks like a close-up!" muttered the curator, fumbling for his explosive bomb. "We'll retreat in good order to the south, boys, if it comes to a fight. Perhaps if I show 'em this bomb it 'll take their minds off it for the present. Good to have it handy, anyhow."

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All eyes were fixed on the shining bauble as he drew it forth. The effect, however, was somewhat different than he had intended. A fierce cupidity shone in the eyes of the old fellow of the trail—here was a bead that transcended all other beads in glory!

“*Kema! Kema!*” (“Give! Give!”) he grunted, avidly, holding out his hand for it.

The curator shook his head. “*Yow-yowri!*” (“Bewitched!”) he said, pointing to the sun. It flashed like a little sun in his hand, but, far from being made afraid by its mysterious reflections, the desire for its possession gleamed fairly murderous out of the pygmies’ eyes. A dozen hands reached out for it. Suddenly a black hand like a monkey’s paw shot under the curator’s arm and the bauble was snatched from his hand. The whites jumped to their feet, gathering in a close knot.

“This won’t do! Back off, boys, and get a little distance from them!” barked the curator. They drew off, Sadok’s shield and sumpitan spear covering their immediate retreat. But the pygmies were paying no attention to them. They fought like wild men for the bomb, snatching it from hand to hand, clawing and biting at one another with primal savagery. In the midst of the snatching

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and grabbing a sharp hiss came to their ears. They had broken off its primer in the struggle!

“Run, fellows, run!” yelled the curator. They did not stop to look back. They heard the thing go off among the pygmies with a thunder that shook the ground under them, as up the hill they tore, past the tree houses and up the stony slopes of the mountain. Below them they could see a great sandy crater in the center of the village, the huts all slanting askew, while warriors were running to the coconut trees, arming themselves hurriedly. A short distance up the hill the curator turned and fired the air pistol with a long-range shell. The deafening crash of its explosion rang through the jungle over the village, and they saw little black men thrown violently about, like black tumble-bugs, with its concussion. They waited no longer, but toiled up the hill as fast as they could climb. Shouts below and calls in the jungle came to their ears. There was plenty of fight left in the little hill men, and they knew that the mountain was being surrounded and that a jungle fight of the most difficult character lay ahead of them.

For a time they climbed steadily. The

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vegetation was thin and one could see for some distance, so that the native archers could not get up close as in the deep jungle. With Sadok and Baderoon as outliers, they headed for the top. The mountain was another extinct volcanic cone, and the same outcroppings of lava rock, the same belts of century plants and aloes, were met as on the mountain back of Cassowary Camp.

Next came bare patches of huge volcanic rocks. They could look out, here, over the sea of jungle-covered mountains, and from the curve of the sides of their own they judged that it was a perfect cone, a volcano of somewhat recent activity. Sadok came running in, and in his hand was a long cane arrow. The point was blood red, and at first they thought he had been hit, but his actions did not indicate it.

"Littly black man close!" he breathed, heavily. "Shoot'm arrow."

The curator took the missile and examined its head carefully. It was made of a blood-red, six-sided crystal, thinned to a point and lustrous and polished.

"Cinnabar, boys!" he exclaimed. "This tribe know all about Red Mountain. That's why they wouldn't let us go south, and it's

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why the southern tribe at Wamberibi would not let the English go north, too! I bet we see it when we reach this cone top!"

They pressed on swiftly, the vegetation now scattered and consisting only of the most arid and gnarly species, all plentifully provided with thorns.

"Look, *Orang-kaya!*!" called Baderoon, hastily, pointing back down the mountain.

Five small hill men were climbing after them on the slopes.

"Never mind them. Put out for the top, boys," shouted the curator, running after them. "We've got to get there and dig in before any flanking parties cut us off."

They raced up over the lava-strewn slopes. The top of the mountain was a bare cone, with a deep, narrow crater, perhaps fifty feet in bore, extending down into it. A faint odor of sulphur came up from its dark depths. Around the lip was fine lava dust and small rocks. For at least fifty yards down the slopes there was no cover of any sort.

"You and Sadok stand off those beggars, Dwight. Dig in on the rim of the crater and pick 'em off. Here's where we make our stand for the present," ordered the curator, as he and the rest of the party ran around

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the crater to the south. They pawed shallow pits in the detritus and lay down, watching the slopes below. No pygmies had come in sight yet, but there was much that was interesting to study. Out of the jungle clearing on the opposite mountain, beyond them to the south, rose the smoke of a huge signal fire, and their glasses could make out huts in the trees near it. To the east, the long wall of the Great Precipice stretched southward, halving one side of the mountain ranges, with the green of the lowland jungle swarming up to its base. Near its brink was a small clearing and yet another pygmy village. It was their country, all right!

But to the southeast rose a sight that held them all breathless. The geological formation in the interior was dark and stratified, of basic instead of volcanic rock, and the ragged edges of thin coal seams could be picked out running through the jungle along bare escarpments. Before them rose sheer a truncated cone of a mountain, separated from the interior formations by a deep gap. Its whole upper half was bare of jungle, and across it, in a horizontal belt, ran a vein of deep pink, at least four hundred feet from top to bottom!

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“Red Mountain!” gasped the curator, as he and Nicky stared speechless at the fabulous wealth spread out before their eyes. “Pure cinnabar—and Lord knows how many million tons of it! It makes that Mexican deposit look like a thirty-cent Mex. dollar when you want to buy a tin of white man’s tobacco with it! Well, while we’ve got time, the most important thing in the world to do now is to locate that mountain on the map.”

The crack of Dwight’s automatic came to their ears as the curator got out his notebook and the mess kit with his surveyor’s compass packed in one of its pans. Dwight and Sadok were already at work, they could hear, and as they opened out the map page a long cane arrow came singing over their shoulders and soared on down the slope.

“Gee! They must be getting close up on that side! Make it snappy, sir!” said Nicky, drawing his revolver and laying it on a rock beside him.

“We’ll add about three miles to the base line, from the banyan tree to this cone,” said the curator, imperturbably, drawing it in with his pencil. Then he sighted Red Mountain most carefully through the compass bars.

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"Distance, about seven miles in an air line, I should judge. What do you think, Nick?"

Baderoon, to their right, gave a grunt and shot his stout bow. The arrow soared down the slope and into a thick aloe clump on the edge of the jungle. A little black man rose out of it and fell over backward.

"Good shot, Baderoon!" commented Nicky, admiringly. There was no better archer, or fighter, either, than their Papuan "black-boy!" Nicky squinted across at Red Mountain, shimmering in the distance.

"Seven, or nearly eight miles, I should say," he pronounced, judgmentally.

An arrow sprung from a rock about seventy yards down the slope as he spoke. It came nosing up to them and fell just in front.

Nicky sighted the spot with his Officer's Model. "Here's where I scintillate!" he laughed. "This old six-gun's at her best at long range. Save your shells, Mr. Baldwin. I'll get that bird!"

Another arrow soared overhead, coming from the west. Then the curator gave a low exclamation.

"Look, Nick! There goes another signal fire, far to the south. We'll have all pygmy land around us in another day!"

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The revolver barked at that instant, and a puff of dust flew out from the side of the rock behind which a hill man lay concealed.

"Scared him to death, anyhow!" joked Nicky, turning to look at the new fire.

"We're surrounded, all right, except on the east, and we can't hold off a whole army of them," said the curator. "We've got two impossible things to do, as I see it—get in to Red Mountain and bring off some specimens and then make our escape from the country."

"Fat chance!" grunted Nicky, cheerfully, firing his revolver again.

The curator studied the prospect to the east, for there lay their only hope of escape. The terrific geological fault that had made the Great Precipice was nearly buried on that side by the outpourings from their volcano when it had been active, but the lava swept down to the precipice edge in a frightful slope, where it ended abruptly. Blue distance beyond it told of a considerable drop; how much could not be conjectured.

The arrows were coming more thickly, now. It seemed that at least twenty of the little hill men lay concealed in among the boulders below them, and the occasional pop of Dwight's automatic told that more

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of them had come up on his side also. Only to the east was there a free passage, but no man could live on that slope. Nicky and Baderoon were both busy, and once in a while they would get one of the pygmies, exposing himself recklessly in some crawl to a nearer point of vantage. The curator borrowed Nicky's alcohol cook kit and went down below the rim of the crater to a little rocky ledge inside on the brink of its deep bore. Here he set about making a mulligan for the party, for it was now long past high noon. He shook his half-empty canteen after filling the soup tin.

"Water running low!" he muttered, uneasily. "We've got to get out of this to-night! It's up to me to do a scout down to the precipice brink this afternoon, sometime."

A perfect fusillade of shots, and a yell for help from Dwight's side, caused him to jump to his feet hastily and rush for that side of the crater. Putting his head cautiously over the brink, he instantly whipped out his air gun, for a long black line of pygmies was charging up the slope, each man behind his shield, the yellow blades of their bamboo knives sticking up over their shoulders.

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Sadok's sumpitan was powerless against them, and Dwight was frantically shoving a fresh clip into the butt of his automatic. Then a shell from the air gun whistled on its way, and its explosion burst in a riving crash over the center of the black line. Dwight opened fire and those on the right flank began to fall back, while Sadok, no longer able to contain himself, dashed down the slope at the survivors of the left flank. He flung himself at them with whirling parang as bamboo knives flashed out, and in another instant he was in the center of a whirlwind of flashing knives. The parang-ihlang sheared through their shields like paper, for Sadok was a star swordsman. Five to one, he was getting the best of them, when the white flash of a keen bamboo knife cut him across the shoulder and he fell, guarding himself with the parang in his left hand.

Dwight's bullets flew like hail, while the curator dashed down the slope, armed only with Sadok's abandoned sumpitan spear. In a second he found himself facing the shields of the two pygmy survivors, who circled him with ready knives. They were as light as feathers, but so keen that a single cut would sever off a head, the curator knew; also that

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he was a mere dub with that spear! Standing over Sadok, he stood them off with the spear point, while the little black men danced and feinted around him, watching their chance. He had counted on Dwight following him, but a quick patter of shots from the crater came to his ears, telling that they were busy at something urgent up there, too. Then Sadok staggered to his feet.

“Shoot, *Orang!*” he gasped, hoarsely. In a flash the curator divined his meaning. The sumpitan held a dart! He raised it suddenly to his lips and blew the missile full into the face of the pygmy opposite him. The other dashed in, to be met by the flash of Sadok’s parang, which sheared the bamboo knife aimed at the curator like a straw. Defenseless, he turned and ran for the jungle, while the other pygmy fell in a limp heap before him.

With Sadok leaning heavily on him, weak from loss of blood, the curator crawled slowly up the slope. Another arrow came singing out of the jungle and sailed close over their heads. With a curse of rage, he turned and shelled the spot with his air gun. A crackle of fire followed the detonation. The dry thicket seemed to leap into red flame, set

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afire by the shell, and clouds of white smoke swept up the slope after them. Meanwhile a heavy sputtering of pistol shots came from over the crater brim. Acting on a sudden impulse, the curator bore off to the east and dropped Sadok behind some boulders near the rim of the precipice. Then he crawled down carefully from rock to rock, looking up anxiously over his shoulder at the summit, for they were evidently hard pressed up there. The yawning abyss fell away below him as he came to the edge and looked over. Below was the green jungle of no-man's land, the vegetation creeping up the lava talus part way, where it was finally stopped by lack of moisture and soil. From the brink to the nearest point below was at least a hundred feet of sheer fall, and from there on down the slope was the limit angle of repose. Without a long rope there was no escape that way.

"Well," said the curator to himself, after an examination, "of the two impossibilities, we'll have to give up Red Mountain and try this! Eight miles through pygmy land, with them buzzing like hornets about us—good Lord!" he groaned. "Our report will have to go as it stands."

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A yell came from Dwight, up in the crater.

"Where are you, Mr. Baldwin?" it called.

"We stood 'em off! Close call! Hurry up! they're getting ready for another rush."

"Bring everything and come on down here!" he yelled back. "Now's your chance."

Presently Dwight, Nicky, and Baderoon came creeping over the brink on the north side. They slid down the slope on their backs and flung themselves among the first large boulders. The jungle to the north was now a crackling mass of fire, driven on by the west monsoon, while a fog of smoke covered that side. Behind it lay the pygmies, unable to pass, and they were safe for the present from that quarter. But how soon a rush would be made from the west and south they could not tell. The curator crept back and brought Sadok from where he lay hidden in the boulders. Bandaging the gash on his right shoulder as swiftly as he could, he got their party together on the precipice brink and each man contributed whatever he had that would go toward making a rope. The boys' two tent ropes, the curator's hammock rope, and Sadok's turban cloth were knotted together hastily. Then came the curator's hammock and the two tent

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flies. Tying the upper end to a gnarly iron-wood bush that grew near the brink, they let it all down over the cliff, where the lower end dangled far below, still some twenty feet above the slope.

“Won’t do!” said the curator, grimly, hauling it up again. “A man’s got to land there on his feet or he’ll never escape pitching on down that steep slope. Quick, now, all your belts, boys!” They were added on and the rope lowered again. Shouts and yells came from the summit. At least forty of the little men were up there, singing and dancing with victory around the crater.

“Well, I’m off!” said Nicky, who was the most fearless climber of them all. He shook hands abruptly and swung over the brink.

X

CINNABAR MOUNTAIN

A CHORUS of shouts arose from the pygmies as they discovered the little knot of whites clustered on the precipice brink. Brandishing their weapons, they climbed on down, shooting as they ran. The curator stopped them with a shell that shook the mountain side like an earthquake and sent a shower of stones rolling down upon their own position. A yell came up from below. Nicky had arrived on the slope and was stamping a shelf in the lava stones, sending showers of them rolling on down below him. Dwight grabbed the rope and went down after him, leaving his automatic with the curator. The hill men were now sneaking down toward them, exposing themselves only occasionally to the sumpitan and pistol.

“Good-by, *Orang-kaya!*” said Baderoon, fumbling next at the rope. “Me prenty ‘fraid—but me go!” He swung himself over and dropped down swiftly.

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"You next, Sadok. Can you manage it?" said the curator, anxiously. The Dyak smiled grimly; wounds, weakness, physical disability, were nothing when the spirit commanded. His fearless face showed that his mind could overrule the frailties of his body.

"Me do!" he grunted, and down over the cliff he went, his wounded right arm forced to do its part. The curator turned and faced the pygmies.

"Fine little men!" he grinned. "Some day you will be swept away like chaff—but here's one explorer who can appreciate you! Good-by!"

He swung over and dropped down the rope, hand over hand. The men of that old, old race, centuries before the first Papuan came to these shores, were still in his mind as he descended. He regretted that he could not have lived with them peacefully and studied their natures more thoroughly. The ancient civilization of the hunting tribes was theirs, and with it a mental quality that had kept them inviolate among their hills in spite of a ring of hostile Papuan savages below them, far superior in stature and numbers to all their tribes put together. Like most of the

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real aborigines of the world, they would well repay study.

When he arrived at the foot of the rope the rest of the party had tramped quite a trail along the foot of the cliff. Stones that now showered over from above told them that it was essential to get to the jungle as quickly as possible, and the shortest way was obviously along the cliff base and over the turn of the volcanic cone poured down here by former eruptions.

But Nicky looked back at the rope, longingly. He hated to leave all that good equipment behind. The rope part they could dispense with, but without the curator's hammock and their own tent flies the jungle would be a misery during the afternoon thunderstorms.

"Hike along, boys. I'm going to make a try at that rope before they find it and haul it up!"

Unmindful of the curator's expostulations, amid the rain of falling stones, he crouched close to the cliff face and drew out his revolver. Most of the stones were dropping far out; it would be a mere chance if he were hit. Three times he fired at the knot above the curator's hammock, a mark perhaps forty

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feet off. Then an arrow struck the rock at his feet with a sharp tang, and, looking up, he saw one of the pygmies leaning far out over the cliff, aiming at him again. The rope had shaken a little at one of the shots and on this faint hope he sprang for the tent fly and tugged fiercely at it. He thought he felt a strand or two of it break and so jumped up on the tent fly, coming down with all his weight. Another arrow spun past him. He realized that it was only the peculiarity of having a vertical target that saved him, for the archer above was overshooting him because of it. With a last violent tug the rope strand parted, and Nicky sprawled headlong down the lava slope. Like a cat he spread-eagled, flattening himself out on the rubble of small stones, and finally he fetched up a considerable distance down the slope.

He was now a mark for a dozen arrows from above and they buzzed at him like hornets. Rising, he leaped on down, stabbing with his feet and sending an avalanche of rocks on before him. His strides kept getting longer and longer. A breathless feeling of getting out of control, falling down the slope faster and faster, made him think quick. He must stop himself at any hazard, risk a

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fall, if need be! He resolved on the latter, and, throwing himself sidewise, came down with a bump that jarred every bone in his body. He saw stars for an instant, but held his consciousness. Looking back, he could see that he was far out of range now. Rubbing himself painfully, he got up and started to step gingerly from rock to rock across the slope.

But the hill men weren't done with him yet. A great stone fell over the cliff and came bounding down straight toward him. Nicky dodged it, as derisive yells came from up above. Two more rocks came whizzing down the slope, bounding like cannon balls. They seemed very terrific, but the boy stood his ground and watched them pass, shooting in a great arc high overhead and landing with a shock against the trees down in the jungle below. He realized that he was not so easy to hit; that all it required was watchfulness and care to win out.

The slope was so steep that he could toss a pebble clear down to the jungle below him, it seemed. Rocks, cactus, and century plants covered the hill, the former so unstable that they had to be tested before putting weight on them. As quickly as he could the

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boy picked his way along the slope, dodging rocks of all sizes flung down from above. Shouts of encouragement came from his own party under the cliff, who now were moving along fast, calling for him to hurry. Then a yell of warning echoed down from the curator, and Nicky looked up, bewildered. The hill men had brought a pole from the jungle and were prying off a whole ledge of stones hanging loosely poised above the cliff edge.

He leaped along like a mountain goat, stumbling and sliding, starting rocks by the dozen. The pygmies had chosen a place where the avalanche would fall right across his path, and he could hear the distant grumble of it as he jumped. Desperately his eyes looked below for a refuge, and then he dove for a huge boulder and fell flat behind it as the roar, it seemed, of the whole slope coming down upon him sounded in his ears. Determined to die game, he rose behind his rock as the noise swept down toward him, for he was more afraid that his own rock would start and crush him than anything else, and had determined to leap out at the first sign of its going.

Then came the roar of hurtling stones

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passing over him in a flying cloud of dust. The thunder of it was appalling. His own rock moved with the jar, slightly, and then settled back on its foundations again as Nicky recalled the impulse to jump clear. Then came a wave of fine pebbles and dust, curling around the ends of his rock and forming a sort of pit around him. Showers of small stones cascaded over the top and fell down on him like a rain. It gave him an idea. As the landslide subsided he crouched, hidden behind the rock. Anxious calls came from under the cliff, but Nicky lay hid. Why not pretend that the avalanche had buried him? He only hoped that the curator or Dwight would not attempt to come out and rescue him.

The silence up on the cliff was broken by exulting yells, and he could hear them stringing along now above the precipice, searching for the whereabouts of the curator's party below. If they would only keep on without him!

Another "*Coo-eee!*" came from under the cliff. "*Nicky! Are you alive, old scout?*" came the yell of Dwight's voice.

He dared not call back. The hill men were too keen, and not easily fooled. He lay quiet, listening. Presently the crackle of

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falling stones and more yells and cries along the cliff told that their party had been located. They were probably retreating along under the cliff as fast as possible. Nicky turned and crept down the slope on his stomach, looking back to see that the rock still hid him from sight of the cliff top above. Then he worked over behind a small bush and peered up through it. Whether there were hill men watching the slope, concealed among the rocks above, he could not tell, but there probably were. The whole north side of the volcano was smoking with the jungle fire and it crept down until the thickets on the verge of the precipice were red with burning trees. He noted with relief that it barred the passage of their pursuers that way, or at least it necessitated a detour, and he hoped that their party had gotten away.

Whether to risk exposing himself now was the question. He was alone in the heart of wildest New Guinea, and it was necessary to rejoin their party and make a speed back toward the boat, for undoubtedly the hill men knew of a defile down the precipice somewhere which would let them out into no-man's land. Also thunderheads were sweeping up from the south, and it would

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not be an hour before the afternoon storm would be due.

Well, one thing was certain, he ought to let his people know that he was still alive before they got out of hearing. Nicky drew his revolver and fired two shots quick with it. A whoop came from up on the mountain. They were watching the slope still! Then two shots from Dwight's automatic barked, muffled, from over the shoulder of the cone. It sounded as if from the jungle. They would either wait for him there or circle, the boy reasoned. Probably the latter, and he could rejoin them down below at the foot of the slope. And now was the time to run, for he could hear the hill men above calling for their companions and presently the whole tribe would be back.

Nicky rose and jumped down the slope. He got a glimpse over his shoulder of two tiny black fellows dancing and hurling rocks impotently, and then gave all his attention to getting down, for the slide was steeper than a log chute. Swiftly the jungle seemed to rise up to meet him, and with a final bound he reached the friendly shelter of the trees and darted out of sight.

Then, for the first time, his aching, bruised

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leg forced itself into consciousness and he began to limp. Directing shots between him and Dwight gave them his location, and then calls and shouts brought them together.

Dwight came running through the jungle, grinning with joy.

"Gee! old man, we'd given you up for lost!" he yelled, capering about and punching Nicky with delight. "Got all the plunder with you, too, haven't you!"

"Sure!" gurgled Nicky, happily. "That's what this war's all about! Where's Mr. Baldwin?"

"Back there a bit, waiting for us," said Dwight. "We got to make time. Forced march all night."

"Going to be a wet one, too!" retorted Nicky, limping along as a mutter of thunder came rolling up from the south. "We'd better keep the tent flies out."

They rejoined the curator, who noticed the game leg as soon as Nicky came up. "Tough luck, kid!" he said, after congratulations had been exchanged. "I'll have to ask you to grin and bear it as best you can, for we've got our work cut out for us to-night!" He drew his compass, took a bearing—and started *south*, through the jungle!

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A general grunt of amazement ran through the party. "Why, Mr. Baldwin, I thought we were to hurry north, so as to get back to the canoe ahead of them!" cried Dwight, voicing the feeling of them all.

"Well, I'll tell you," replied the curator, heading on steadily through the thickets just below the base of the volcanic talus. "It's a bit of psychology that I've been working out. In the first place the pygmies, I'm sure, think as you all thought. They judged by our actions that we were beaten and would think of nothing but hurrying back to the sea again. They will make forced marches, to-night, to head us off, I'll bet! And then we must reckon on the human nature of our own folks, too. 'Seeing is believing' is one of the truest old sayings there are. In other words, we've simply *got* to bring back some real specimens of that cinnabar and be able to swear where we got it. No financier that I know will back a company to open up mines on the mere say-so of a red mountain seen eight miles off. I know red mercury ore strata as far as I can see it—but I *might* be mistaken. Suppose it should turn out to be just red clay, or red iron ore!"

"Gosh, sir! you're right!" put in Nicky.

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"I sort of felt that way myself, but I suppose I did not feel it hard enough to really do a stunt like this!"

"Sure!" smiled the curator. "It's the difference between a youth and a man, Nick. The youth gets the vague feeling, but he's as like as not to do nothing about it; the man reasons until he is convinced by the force of logic—then he acts. Now I was studying the wall of the Great Precipice when we were on the brink doing the rope fire-escape trick, with just this idea in mind. There are gaps in this precipice all along it, where the rivers tumble down from the hill country to the low jungle on their way to the sea. I marked one, some distance beyond that first signal fire to the south. It can't be more than five miles from there in to Cinnabar Mountain, and the gap's about five miles from here. Can we do ten miles to-night? That's the question."

"How about getting past that village?" asked Dwight.

"That's the nice thing about my scheme," laughed the curator. "I figure that all their fighting men have gone north, long ago, to aid the men of our village in repelling invaders. Those signal fires are evidently used to call

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the clans when war parties of the Outanatas attack them. The women and children, and perhaps a few old men, will be all that we are likely to encounter, and we ought to slip by them successfully in the night."

"Won't they come down our rope and track us, sir?" said Nicky. "I've been worrying about that, although no one tried it while I was on that slope."

"You answered that with your revolver, Nick!" chuckled the curator. "No man can drop forty feet to that talus and live. Of course they may bring up more ropes, in time, but my idea is that all that's left of them, with perhaps a party of fighting men from this village ahead, are now hot-fooding it for some pass that they know of to the north. We'll be on Red Mountain and giving them the laugh while they are looking for us up near the lagoon—and let's hope they fall in with a war party of the Outanatas while they are about it! Here comes the rain, men," he broke off. "We'll make camp and cook something and get a bit of sleep until the moon comes up."

They chose a spot well hidden in the jungle and the tent flies were spread on poles. A monumental feed was cooked, between Nicky's

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alcohol burner and a small fire well hidden in the rocks under the tents, while the rain came down in its usual torrential downpour. Then they all turned in for some much-needed sleep. By nine o'clock the rain had stopped and a faint light over the jungle promised moonlight through the thinning clouds. The party was roused out and they broke camp, Nicky and Sadok, who were stiff and sore, being rubbed down with arnica by the curator before setting out. With the tent flies wrapped around them, the three whites set out through the wet jungle, with Sadok and Baderoon, whose naked skins seemed to revel in the raindrops, leading on ahead.

In an hour they had reached the banks of a small, swift stream, the headwaters of some river that emptied into the sea fifty miles away. Alligators, water snakes, and giant frogs plopped into its eddying depths as they came up. The splash and gurgle of waterfalls came from up the slope. Pushing along carefully, on the lookout for pythons and snakes of lesser degree, they climbed up along its banks. Steeper and more rocky became the gorge through which it defiled. Then rocky ledges of black basalt hemmed

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them in on both sides, and out of the gap cascaded a foaming waterfall.

In the weird moonlight, with the black shadows almost solid to the touch, it seemed to Nicky and Dwight that that was the most perilous climb they had ever ventured upon. Baderoon was quaking with fear and hanging back reluctantly, for he was no hill man, but the curator and the intrepid Sadok led on upward, pioneering out the way and hauling them up the steeper ledges by a tent fly let down for a rope. Higher and higher they climbed, the jungle falling away below almost vertically, while towering above them rose the walls of the gorge for thousands of feet. It seemed good to be at last buried deep in the cleft, with visions of the awful fate that would befall them below, if any slipped, hid mercifully from sight.

The stream came down in a series of cascades, varied by steep stretches where it sluiced along through deep channels in the rock. At one place they came to a veritable waterwheel where the whole torrent raced down a slope into a shallow basin scooped out of the solid basalt, and it shot up in a roaring pinwheel of water through which not even Sadok's sumpitan could be driven.

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Above it the walls of the gorge closed in to a narrow cleft, with high, vertical sides. There was no getting past, on either side!

“Case of swim!” ejaculated the curator, as they all stopped and looked in at the deep pool filling the cleft from wall to wall like a black ribbon. “Get out your flashers, boys. There’s one grain of comfort in it, anyway—no one would ever dream that we’d come up this way!”

They undressed and did up the bundles in the tent flies.

“Glory be to Mike, there are no anacondas in New Guinea!” shivered Nicky, looking at the black pool and thinking of former Guiana jungle days.

Still, it took courage to negotiate that pool! They scanned every inch of the wall for snakes and then plunged in, close together for mutual protection, the flashlights tied atop the boys’ heads with their bandannas, and the packs strapped on their shoulders. It seemed that that pool would never end! Its narrow ribbon of still water wound on and on through the cleft, with here and there a ledge or a rock shelf over which the water tumbled in a silent spillway, and where they could get out and rest. From ahead came,

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louder and louder, the roar of a waterfall. The curator listened uneasily. Such a cascade would be a catastrophe, for, if there was no way around it, by no possibility could they get up farther.

They hurried on eagerly, now, anxious to learn their fate, fear of some unknown thing seizing them from under water forgotten. A final pool showed up in the glare of the flashlights. The curator heaved a huge sigh of relief, for the head of the pool was a foaming suds of eddying water into which the stream of the cascade tumbled from above, and—blessed sight!—sticking up out of it was a huge tree, jammed in there by some freshet, its upper end jutting out into the stars which shone through the opening of the cleft!"

"Praise be!" ejaculated the curator, plunging in. "Come here, tree—I love you!"

They all swam over, and one by one crept up the log. A low hail from the curator, and the hissed caution, "Lights out!" told them that he had arrived safely in the ravine above. They found him already dressing. They were in a steep, rocky ravine, filled with jungle growth, and out of the bare rocks at last. Hastily the boys dressed and made

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up their packs again. Sadok and Baderoon had merely to shake themselves and they were ready for further adventures.

“All aboard—and no talking!” whispered the curator, as they pushed on up the ravine. For a mile it climbed steeply, and then Sadok halted and pointed silently into the jungle. A well-defined path came down to the brook here; and there were empty gourds and crude pottery jars on the bank.

“We are opposite the second village,” whispered the curator. “Step lightly, fellows, and be careful not to break a stick. We’ll bear off to the left, to high ground.”

They went on noiselessly, following the general windings of the creek in the bright moonlight. After another mile of it the curator halted.

“I’ve a hunch that Red Mountain is somewhere near us by now,” he muttered, cautiously. “Nicky, you’re the best climber. Swarm up that pandanus, as high as you can get, and take a look-see.”

Nicky went over to the tree and was soon up in its branches. Below him fell away the lesser growth of the jungle. Other tall trees still surrounded him, but as he shinnied up a high branch, at last a vista to the east

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opened up. For a long time he gazed, with all the exultation of the civilized white man, on an object of immense value to his race, even though surrounded and protected by a ring of savagery. Before him, shimmering in the clear moonlight, lay the irregular truncated cone of Red Mountain, the enormous vein of cinnabar parting its upper half like pink layer cake! Black seams of coal measures streaking the mountain face told of the geological period when the mountain was born. Behind it piled up the stratified peaks and table-lands of similar mountain formations. The whole story lay clear in the educated, scientific mind of the boy, and he thrilled with its significance. Here lay the true geological formation of the interior of Dutch New Guinea, with Red Mountain as a last outpost. Behind him lay the tremendous fault of the Great Precipice, with its chain of volcanoes resulting from that mighty crack in the earth's surface. But before him lay all the mineral wealth of New Guinea—coal measures, iron ore, what not—that would make this vast island, the largest in the world—almost a continent—a land of the utmost value to the white race!

Coming back to earth from these explorer's

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dreams, Nicky got out his compass and took the mountain bearing. It was not over two miles from where they were to the slopes of Red Mountain. Between them lay a low, jungle-clad ridge; beyond it a swale or hollow of some kind, and then the slopes themselves. He swarmed down the tree to report, and then they all set out eagerly, in a straight line through the dry, arid thickets.

In half an hour they reached the top of the little ridge, and the curator found a leaning dead tree and climbed out on it for a long, soul-satisfying look for himself. Returning, they pitched down into the swale, crossed it, and began to climb. Their watches said four o'clock in the morning, so it was necessary to hasten, as they would be in plain sight on that bald spot.

Up and up the steep hillside they struggled, bidding the jungle good-by, negotiating shelves and rocky escarpments that turned out to be ledges ten feet high when they came to them. Far overhead towered the flat side of the mountain, almost a precipice, and the depths dropping below warned them that it would be mountaineering of the most dangerous kind.

A few more ledges; soul-harrowing crawls

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up rocky faces to which they clung with feet digging into tiny crevices and fingers clawing desperately at crumbly holds, and they had reached the bottom edge of the vein!

Dwight's pick dug into the rich, red ore, and a lump of translucent scarlet crystals, hard as adamant and surrounded with a matrix of crumbling red ore, fell out into his hand. He passed it to the curator.

"We've sure gone through hell for it, sir!" he exclaimed. "I guess we've done our bit for New Guinea, eh?"

"We sure have!" exclaimed the curator, feelingly. "You and Nicky each get a specimen like this and stow it in your packs. And now, fellows, an air line for our camp on the lagoon. We can make it in two days!"

XI

THE FLIGHT TO THE COAST

DAWN was paling in the east as they crept slowly down the ledges of Red Mountain. The going down was far worse than the climb up, and the tent flies had to be called in play again to get over vertical drops of ten feet or more where one's eyes could not see below how to climb down. Even then the haunting fear that some old pygmy watcher from the village might have spied them on the mountain side lent haste to their descent. It was with relief that they all gathered in the depths of the jungle again.

"Now, then, fellows, there's only one way we can do this march to the coast. We three will have to keep together while Sadok scouts on ahead. Baderoon I'm going to turn loose, and let him run for it for Cassowary Camp and then down that trail to the Outanata village, where he can get a war party started back to rescue us.

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"Baderoon, you-fellah run catch'm Outanata man?" he asked.

The negro grinned. He looked fresh and fit, and his long legs could take him like a moose through the jungle.

"*Orang-kaya* give me-fellah sign take 'long black boy?" he suggested.

"Sure! They might murder you for your mirror, in all your youth and innocence!" laughed the curator. "Here, Nicky, get out a couple of your empty alcohol tins. The chief 'd love them, to put in his ears."

Baderoon eyed them longingly as Nicky got out the cans from his rucksack. He'd have dearly loved to put them in his own ears, only the important detail of stretching the lobe enough for such ornaments had been neglected in his youth. Such does contact with civilized whites debase the poor savage! He handled the cans reverently, and finally stowed them somehow in his loin cloth.

"Tell'm the Thunderer make war on litty black men—plenty heads!" grinned the curator. "Run—plenty—too much!"

Baderoon laughed merrily and set off into the jungle without a word. By some way known only to himself he would cover those thirty miles that day, threading alone through

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the trackless jungle. By noon next day a war party of the Outanatas would be halfway back to them, thirsting for a foray on their ancient enemies, the pygmies—with the powerful aid of the man who called down the lightnings—or the curator was no judge of human nature!

After Baderoon had gone, they studied the mountains and valleys to the south for some time, planning a route.

“That big sugar loaf to the northeast looks familiar to me, Nick,” said the curator. “Don’t you remember it, from our banyan tree outlook?”

They got out the map, and presently located it from bearings taken on the map from their position on Red Mountain. Once on that sugar loaf, it would be easy to locate the bald knob above Cassowary Camp.

He pointed out the shoulder to Sadok. “We go there,” he explained. “You stop ‘long front. You see black man, make ‘m call like red lory, two time, and come back.”

Sadok comprehended quickly, and with a white flash of his teeth led on, his sumpitan balanced in his hands for instant use, and so they set out. In two hours they had reached the shoulder, some six miles through the

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jungle, and were cautiously reconnoitering for a lookout. After some climbing, a ledge was found that rose over the summits of the trees below. They wormed up it and lay flat in the grass on its edge, spying out the country with their glasses. Over to the east rose the cone of the old volcano, with the pygmy village on it, the girls' tree huts visible like white specks in the sunlit clearing. Beyond that was the mountain with the great banyan tree on its north shoulder, and beyond that again in the blue distance, about twelve miles off, the bald knob above Cas-sowary Camp.

But it was the green jungle below them that they searched most carefully. The view below was not reassuring. The haze of at least three fires rose above the trees at widely different points. Allowing forty men to each war party, there would be over a hundred of the pygmy warriors outlying between them and their home base.

"We'll stay right here, boys, until the rain—and then, by George! we'll try to push through them during the storm!" declared the curator, with sudden resolution. "It 'll be pitch black for at least two hours after that. How's the ammunition, fellows?"

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"I've only got twelve cartridges left, sir," said Nicky, lugubriously, "and Dwight has two clips, and then he's through."

"Well, I've only got four shells, myself," said the curator, cheerfully. "Two of them are thirty-yard close-ups. We'll have to husband ammunition for a possible rush, and depend on Sadok. You got'm plenty dart, Sadok?" he asked.

The Dyak shook his head and opened the cover of his bamboo quiver. "Poison him all gone, too!" he announced.

"We've got our work cut out for us, then! We'll camp and get something to eat, and then wait until the clouds come before setting out. Meanwhile we'll have to find a upas vine, or something like it. Either of you boys know strychnine when you see it?"

They shook their heads. Botany was out of their line.

"Got to know 'most everything if you're a scientist," grinned the curator, deprecatingly. "Well, the species we want is *S. tieute*, native of all this archipelago, the upas vine. It's a climbing shrub, five-leaved, with little bunches of berries in a leathery rind like a small dried orange."

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"I think I've noticed one or two like that, sir, myself, going through the jungle," said Dwight, reminiscently. "Climbs all over larger trees, doesn't it?" He sketched a leaf on a bit of rock as he spoke.

"Yep. That's him. You and Sadok scout around for one while Nick and I get ready some eats," said the curator. "You may also find the *upas tree*, which is of the bread-fruit family, but I doubt it. Never heard of it south of Java. Look for a tall tree a hundred feet high, with lanceolate leaves and berries in a drooping cluster. Both are used for poisoning arrows and darts, from the Philippines south."

Dwight arranged a lory call for Sadok, in case either of them should need the other, and they separated, each vanishing into the lower jungle.

Dwight walked along, searching the jungle growth with keen eyes. Gradually his course led him around the flank to the south and into a deep ravine, with great trees dropping down the slopes below him into the depths. It was impossible to see far, in here, so he climbed up a small tree and looked out. The ravine led up the mountain side, with all the jungle spread out like a map on its

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flanks. Searching carefully each giant trunk, he at length spied one overgrown with a profusion of some vine that looked promising, and, marking it, he set out. In ten minutes he was close enough to the vine to examine it more carefully. The reddish bark, the five-fingered leaf, looked as if it might be one of that famous family of strychnine trees that extends all around the tropics, from India through the archipelago, to South America and across Africa. Dwight thrilled with a primal, almost superstitious fear as he looked at this sinister representative of its race. It was more deadly than a cobra, if it could bite you! All the stories he had ever heard of the poisonous air that surrounds the strychnine trees came to him; and that fabled Valley of Death in Java, grown thick with upas trees in which nothing can live, came to mind. He kept his distance from the dreaded vine, respectfully, and was about to try to reach Sadok with a call, when voices coming through the jungle arrested him. He sank into the undergrowth and watched through its green depths.

The voices came nearer, guttural tones that set him shivering with excitement. They were coming down the ravine on his side and

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would pass quite near him, he judged. He drew his automatic and waited.

Then three diminutive black-bearded warriors came into view, passing down what must have been a trail through the jungle, although he had not noticed any in crossing. They passed silently through the green glade, and then two more came into view. Before them they drove a prisoner, a tall Papuan.

Dwight gasped as he looked to make sure—it was Baderoon—captured by the pygmies!

All the generous instincts of youth rose up in him at the sight, and without thinking further he raised his pistol and fired at the nearest pygmy. With grunts of surprise they all bolted into the forest, while Baderoon leaped into the jungle and came running toward him, his arms bound behind his back. Dwight raised his helmet out of the underbrush an instant so Baderoon could find him, and then sank out of sight. An arrow came singing and tanging through the twigs, and then Baderoon stumbled into his lair and fell at his feet.

“*Orang-kichil! Cut!*” he gasped, turning over on his face. Dwight drew his hunting knife and severed the fibers that bound him. Baderoon wriggled over, his face alight with

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its happy, care-free Papuan smile. Then came the grim lines of pain as he bore stoically the throes of returning circulation in his arms. Dwight kept up a cautious vigil, expecting momentarily an arrow from some unseen source in the jungle. And the presence of the deadly upas vine behind him did not leave any illusions as to how that arrow would be armed!

Still the stealthy silence! It was his first taste of real jungle fighting, and the boy would gladly have exchanged it for any amount of odds in the open, where one could see and think. Not a bush moved, not a stick cracked; the pygmies might have utterly vanished from the earth, for any sign that the jungle gave to the contrary.

Then came the call of the Papuan lory, twice repeated. It was not far off, and it roused Dwight to a frenzy of hard thinking. The curator and Nicky, with perhaps Sadok, also, were coming, having heard his pistol shot. They must be warned at any hazards. To move from his place of concealment was death. He cudgeled his brains for an answer, turning over one plan after another rapidly and rejecting them all.

Three of anything means "Danger!" in the

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wilderness, all over the world; such a signal they would at once comprehend, and act accordingly. Three pistol shots would give his location away by their smoke. Dwight raised his voice and gave the lory call three times in answer.

Bows instantly twanged in the jungle, and two arrows swished through the thickets around his position. Dwight took off his helmet and peered furtively through every vista, searching every tree trunk, but not a sign could he discover whence they came.

Then came the cough of Sadok's sumpitan from somewhere, and a small black-bearded hill man rose suddenly out of the bushes, not thirty feet away, and fell over backward, silently.

"Me go! Me-fellah catch'm bow'n arrow!" whispered Baderoon, from the ground, wringing his wrists vigorously and eying Dwight's hunting knife longingly.

Dwight nodded approval. Two could play at this bushwhacking game! And none better than their own native bushman. He handed Baderoon the knife and the Papuan melted off into the undergrowth toward the body of the dead pygmy.

A long, sinister silence set in. Dwight

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watched in every direction, scanning the forest intensely through his leafy screen, but nothing that he could fire at appeared. Then a sudden shock of fright went through him. Surely that bush over there was much nearer now than when he had looked at it last! Surely it was not natural, growing so close to the roots of that giant euphorbia that towered up near it! Nature did not grow bushes in such dense shade! He was about to fire into it, when a long black arm struck out from behind the tree trunk and there was a flash of bright steel, while the bush writhed in convulsions and then lay still.

Baderoon! In spite of his religious taboo against steel, he had broken it for them. Dwight could appreciate that, and he began to have immense confidence in their two wild allies. In the jungle, where he and the curator and Nicky were helpless, these two were masters. They could beat the pygmies at their own game.

“That’s three,” muttered the boy to himself. Then the essential need to prevent the other two getting away to the main war parties of the pygmies and telling them of their presence presented itself. It seemed vital, to the boy’s imagination, and he even

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thought of sacrificing himself by exposing his position to draw their fire, so that they could be shot by the others and their plans for running the gantlet during the storm could go through.

He was maturing the idea, when a faint rustle in the jungle back of him turned him around, with the hair rising under his helmet with alarm and his pistol ready for instant fire. He saw Sadok's sumpitan rise up cautiously out of the green and lowered again, and the boy breathed relievedly. Presently he caught a glimpse of the Dyak's brown body moving serpentlike toward the upas vine. Out of the depths between it and the trunk of the larger tree overhead the leaves moved. Then came a quick, silent jab of Sadok's kriss into the blood-red bark of the vine. It flashed down again, and Dwight could see the thick, white juice oozing from the wound in the bark. Two brown hands rose out of the foliage and tied on the tiny bamboo poison cup with gingerly care, and then all signs of movement in that direction ceased.

After a long wait, two low calls of the lory came out of the jungle near by. Dwight answered them.

“Come on out, Dwight,” came the curator’s

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voice. "They're gone. We're over this way."

Dwight rose hesitatingly, inch by inch, half expecting every moment to be pierced by a deadly arrow. Then came the exhilaration of freedom. He felt wonderfully alive, eager and able to perform prodigies. He sought out the party, stepping as if on air, his eyes sparkling with an unearthly brilliance. The curator regarded him curiously as he came up.

"Hello! What's struck you, old top?" he exclaimed, vivaciously. "You look as if you'd seen an angel! Mostly devils around here. Baderoone tells me there were only five of them. They ambushed him and trussed him up before he could make a kick or a jump. We got two, and two more got away. The third is outlying somewhere, with Sadok and Baderoone looking for him."

"I got that one, myself," said Dwight. "That was the pistol shot you heard. He was walking just in front of Baderoone. And I found your upas vine, too!" he cried, excitedly.

"Ah, that accounts for it," mused the curator. "Been lying near it a long while?"

"Accounts for what? Yes, I was right near it, ever since I fired that shot."

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"Accounts for your looking like a man who has eaten loco weed, son. You'll be lit up for a while yet; and you need to, for we've got to make a dash, now that those two got away. There's a faint essence of strychnia in the air around the upas vine which acts like medicine on a human being through the pores, Dwight," he explained. "You'll think you can move mountains and perform prodigies of valor, for a time. Then will come the reaction, like a man drunk with too much coffee. Well, boys—let's go."

He raised the lory call to bring in Sadok and Baderoon. They rejoined the party soon, and Dwight noted that the former had the small tube of fresh poison at his belt.

The party pushed on vigorously. As they swept into the valley where the pygmies were camped, thunderclouds gathered overhead and drops of rain began to fall. It grew dark and compass ranges had to be corrected again. Then came the tropical thunder and lightning with the blinding downpour of rain, so that the three white men were glad to shroud themselves in their tent flies. It was a weird march, through the tossing forest, with rain swirling through the trunks in white sheets, and flying dead branches crashing down through the

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grinding limbs. Sadok and Baderoon flanked the party on ahead; so long as neither of them came in, it was understood to be safe to push on at full speed. Their course aimed to pass midway between two of the fires noted from the mountain above, and then turn and strike direct for Cassowary Camp. Baderoon was now well armed, with a bow and shield and plentiful arrows taken from the slain pygmies, and Sadok's quiver was full of fresh darts, so that a feeling of elation filled them as they swept on. The forest was noisy and winddriven with the storm; the snap of broken twigs and the rending of vines and creepers in their path did not have to be guarded against now. Their only danger was in being seen by some outlying scout, for whose abolition they trusted their native allies.

At length the curator pulled out his watch.

"I think we've made it, boys!" he exulted. "At the rate we have been going we must be well past those camps. We'll bear over to the left now, and pick up Sadok. Shove along, boys, faster!—so we can catch up to him!"

They ran through the jungle, bursting and tearing their way through the undergrowth,

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twisting around trunks and dodging under creepers. Still no Sadok. The curator called at intervals, and they pushed on, but no reply came. Then he stopped and raised the lory screech at the top of his lungs.

It was answered by a faint, single call, a short distance ahead. With a quick sense of foreboding they moved forward warily. Then their eyes lit on a brown, muscular figure lying by a tree trunk in the dim light of the roaring jungle—Sadok!

They flung themselves on the ground with one common impulse, and crept rapidly forward. Sadok was still alive when they reached him. His eyes looked over at the curator sleepily.

Then he pointed with three of his outstretched fingers, indicating the directions with a significant brush of his left forefinger swept out over the others. He fell over on his side with the effort and closed his eyes. A long arrow stuck out from the tree over his head and its carmine tip was covered with a whitish glaze that made one shiver to look at it. Blood flowed from a slight scratch on Sadok's shoulder, where the arrow had merely scraped it. The curator leaped at the wound, sucking fiercely at it. He

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shook Sadok roughly, and, reaching for the medicine box in his hip pocket, poured a pellet into his hand and forced it between the Dyak's teeth. Then he rubbed a pinch of purple powder into the cut and called on the boys to help. Together they rolled him back and forth vigorously. While they were at it, another arrow whizzed like a hornet between their heads. They dragged Sadok behind the tree, while Nicky stood guard with his long-barreled .38. He could see nothing in the direction the arrow had come from, but the little hill men were somewhere around them now, that was certain.

Between them, Dwight and the curator had got the Dyak moving feebly again, and, dragging and pulling him roughly, they all managed to crawl on through the jungle. Once lost in the underbrush, safety was assured by vigilance, for their adversaries dared not show themselves, either. It grew steadily darker, and the crash and boom of thunder kept up unceasingly. Now and then the vivid flashes would light up the dark glades and a black form would be seen through the trees, when the insignificant *pop!* of the pistols would ring out.

“Now, boys, it's dark enough to make

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time!" said the curator, halting the party. "Here are two poles that I picked up while crawling along. Make a stretcher of them, and you two carry Sadok, while I cover your retreat."

They rolled a tent fly around the two poles and laid Sadok on the narrow strip of canvas left in between them, while the curator crept off into the jungle to reconnoiter. The crash of Nicky's revolver in his hands came to them once, and after a time he returned and they rose to push on. The Dyak was heavy, and the two boys staggered along, forcing their way through maddening vines and thorn ropes that tore at them in the dark. Behind them, somewhere, was the curator, covering the slow retreat, circling through the forest, occasionally visible when a lightning flash lit up the jungle with its vivid glare.

Once or twice the red flash of his pistol spat out in the dark, and once the sharp blow of an arrow on his back caused Dwight to drop his burden hastily, while Nicky tore it out of his clothing anxiously and made sure that it had not penetrated to the skin.

An hour passed, and then, utterly weary, the boys fell in a heap, pulled down by the wrench of some particularly obstinate vine

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in their path. They waited for the curator despondently. They could do no more. Suddenly Sadok sat up, as if in a trance. He did not speak, but the boys, delighted with this evidence of returning power, pounced on him and pumped his arms and legs with all their strength. They were still at it when the curator returned.

“Glory, Mr. Baldwin—he’s coming round!” yelped Nicky, looking up from his work. “He’s going to get over it!”

“Looks promising!” smiled the curator, getting out another pellet to give Sadok. “We can thank the rain for that! No arrow can stay virulent long in this weather! Raise him to his feet and we’ll try to make him walk.”

They propped Sadok up and, half carrying him, half leading him, they set out again. He staggered along as if walking in his sleep, leaning heavily against first one and then the other of the boys. Gradually the rain abated and the lightning flashes grew less frequent, so that it was necessary for the curator to stop and crouch in the jungle to light up the compass with his flasher concealed under the tent robe. Then came pitch blackness, and the dripping silent jungle hid them like a shroud.

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"I'm afraid we've lost Baderoon, boys," whispered the curator during a stop to take a bearing. "He had plenty of chance to locate us, back there in the storm, we did so much firing. I've had to reload entirely, once. You can't have more than six shots left, Nick."

"I've got a clip and a half, sir," interrupted Dwight, cheerily, "and what is more, Sadok will be in shape again soon. I've noticed his muscles flexing occasionally, of their own steam, while helping him walk. Let's go. We've got two good hours of this yet!"

His artificial buoyancy and untiring energy were a great asset to the tired party now, and they pushed on faster, with Sadok walking almost normally. Mile after mile was passed, and then a glimpse of the stars showed occasionally through the tree tops. They were tired to the limit, but Dwight, under his strange stimulant, pushed on as fresh as if just out of his sleeping bag. Dawn came at length, to sift its dim light through the jungle. It found them still on the march, with Sadok walking unaided, occasionally muttering an incoherent word of Malay.

Then came the murmur of a brook and they

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burst out of the jungle, to splash across it into the open glades, with the mountains towering all around them, their tops hidden by the rising mists of early daylight. The party heaved a huge sigh of relief as they stepped out into the deep wet saw grass. They were about a mile above Cassowary Camp, and it was their own stream that they had crossed. The country looked like home, indeed, to them, for half a day's march farther lay their base camp, the canoe, and freedom.

XII

THE ESCAPE TO ARU

SUDDENLY Sadok began to run. The boys attempted to restrain him, but the curator held them off.

"Let him alone, boys. His mentality's coming back—it's a good sign. Wait."

They watched the Dyak, who was now running in a crouching position, his long sumpitan trailing over the grass in his left hand. As he neared a clump of trees out in the swales he dropped from sight in the grass, his progress only marked by the waving of the blades. They searched the tree carefully, but only what appeared to be a large black mass, well hidden in the dense foliage, offered any possible mark.

Then the sumpitan rose slowly out of the field, and presently a large black bird tumbled down through the trees. The Dyak was on his feet in an instant, dashed through the thicket, and seized his trophy. Then he came back, holding it up triumphantly.

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"Me catch'm new spec'men, *Orang-kaya!*!" he announced, exuberantly. Gone was the dull, expressionless look in his eyes, replaced now by the sparkling zest of the primitive hunter.

"Boys, he's got a long-tailed bird of paradise, by Jove!" cried the curator, excitedly. "Rarer than the *superba*! Great work, Sadok!"

They all ran to him and examined the prize. It was of glossy black, with bronze and purple glories of peacock-coal hues, making the feathers iridescent with changeable colors. A superb tail of feathers two feet long, and the side plumage brushed back, as it were, to form tufts of plumage along both sides of the back, completed the bird's extraordinary ornaments.

"Almost makes you forget the pygmies, eh, Sadok?" grinned the curator, suggestively.

The Dyak's face looked blank. Then his memory began slowly, painfully to work, and he put up his hand slowly and felt the bandage on his shoulder. Gradually his expression changed to comprehension, anger, disgust.

"Ugh!" he shuddered. "Me kill'm two-t'ree! Then me know nothing. Me come hit-arrow?" he asked.

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"Yep. We found you. Carried you through the jungle for miles. Me cure'm upas [poison]. All well now!"

A kind of wonder grew in the Dyak's eyes. It was the first time in his experience that any man had survived a poisoned arrow.

"*Orang-kaya!* him know everyt'ing!" he cried. "Him God—big-fallah!" He stooped down and embraced the curator's knees adoringly.

"Here! Cut it!" said the curator, embarrassed, as he disengaged himself, and there were tears in his eyes. "God Him *great* big-fallah, Sadok! Him live in sky. Him hold the world in his hand, so, Sadok," holding out his cupped hand. "Him make you-fallah save my life, plenty much; make me-fallah save your life! Me tell you 'bout Him, some day, Sadok," he said, affectionately, laying his hand on the Dyak's shoulder. "Gad! and I don't know any greater pleasure than *that* will be, either!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "A man's God is what I will show him! Come on, fellows!" he broke off, hastily. "We got to shove along; it would be death to be caught in these open swales."

The party marched on down toward the old site of Cassowary Camp, and were soon

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at the familiar grounds where so many adventures had befallen them and so many happy days spent in collecting. The mountain loomed up invitingly behind it, and the curator led the way up the slopes.

Dwight felt himself stumbling unaccountably. His eyesight appeared to be wavering, and the bushes that he grasped at to aid in climbing seemed to elude his grasp.

"Mr. Baldwin, quick! I'm fainting!" he gasped, weakly, and he pitched forward on his face, his arms still reaching uphill.

They all stopped.

"The reaction has come," said the curator. "He'll be better soon. I think we can risk an hour's stop and get some rest and something to eat."

His eye roved the mountain side, and finally rested on a rocky ledge with boulders and thickets of thorny bushes on its brink.

"Carry him up there," he ordered. "We'll dig in there and lay low for a bit."

They brought him up, and the curator applied restoratives, while Nicky and Sadok busied themselves in rolling boulders and making the place as impregnable as possible. Then Nicky got out his alcohol kit, with a joke or two about its being the only camp

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fire worth a whoop, and started cooking a soup for all, composed of dried pemmican and soup powder.

The site commanded the swales below for miles. To the left lay the pebbly bars of the creek, with the old trail of the Outanatas entering the jungle like a green tunnel. With ammunition, they could hold this place for a long time, at least until flanking parties had ascended the mountain back of them, but their supply was now reduced to only a few cartridges.

The curator studied the situation over uneasily.

"I do wish Dwight could move!" he said to Nicky at his right. "We might try carrying him, but it seems suicidal to me. The pygmies are coming, sure as death, and they'll move much faster than we could go with a burden. We'd be overtaken before we got halfway back to the canoe. We'll have to stay here and fight. After the ammunition is all gone, every man make for that canoe at top speed. The first one there will get sail on her and wait until forced to draw out to the lagoon. That is about all I can plan ahead at the present. Too bad we lost Baderoon," he sighed.

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“That was the finest black boy I ever knew! No one who ever knew that happy, rollicking native could help loving him—and I rather depended on him getting through and bringing up the Outanatas.”

He went over to where Dwight lay in the shade of a bush.

“How’s it coming, old man?”

“I’m weak as a cat,” said Dwight, lifelessly. “I can’t even move that arm. Pull it in out of the sun and lay it across my chest, won’t you?” he begged, querulously.

The curator shook his head. It would be at least another hour before Dwight could even move his own legs. The curator fidgeted with impatience as he cursed the upas vine and all its relatives. Hours were precious as dear life, now. He had about decided on a scheme for pushing along and carrying Dwight in relays, when a low whistle from Nicky brought him to his feet.

“Here they come, sir!” announced the boy, tensely.

He peered out of their lair. A long line of the little black men swept across the upper swales, arrows on bows, walking about fifteen feet apart, searching warily every foot of the grass. More burst out of the jungle

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along the creek every few moments, and far to the right, other parties could be seen beating across the jungle toward the banyan-tree mountain. Nothing could escape such a dragnet!

They watched them impotently, as the warriors slowly worked down the swales toward their position. There were at least fifty of them in the line that finally reached the site of Cassowary Camp. Then they began to slowly filter up the mountain side.

"Now's our only chance!" said the curator in a low voice. "Sadok, you pick off any that come near this position, or any that seem likely to discover us, and we'll hope that the rest may go by without finding us."

"How about their finding the canoe before we do?" suggested Nicky, eagerly.

"I've thought of that. We've got to move as soon as they pass us, and get Dwight along somehow. Sadok and I will carry him. We'll have to beat 'em to it."

A pygmy came out of the bushes directly below him, and his little black eyes popped with sudden discovery. Before he could utter a yell a dart from Sadok's sumpitan ended him. Then another appeared, working uphill to their right, and he, too, was tumbled

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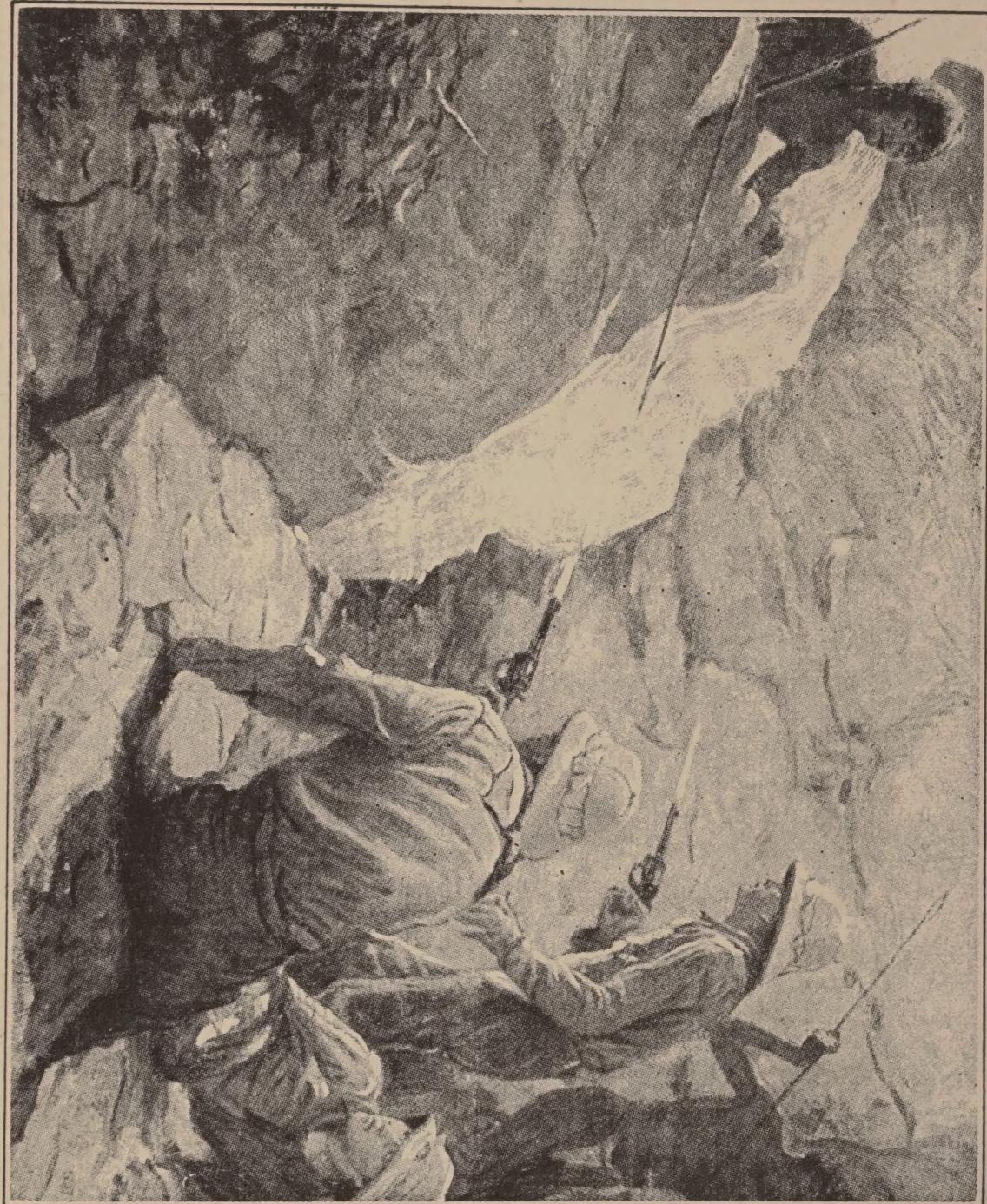
over in a silent heap. The curator felt a touch on his arm. He turned his head, to see Dwight, who had crawled over on hands and knees, and he was pointing up to their left with a look of horror in his eyes. There stood a pygmy in plain sight in the act of raising the warwhoop!

The pistols barked in unison with the high-pitched yell that the man let out. There were swift rustlings all over the mountain side, and a knot of warriors below charged up the hill, shouting their battle cries. The curator dropped a shell on them. A great brown geyser of earth and stones obliterated the group, simultaneous with its thundering report, and the jungle below burst into flames with the intense heat of the explosion. In another instant there was not a pygmy in sight anywhere on the whole landscape.

"Now, then, cut and run for it!" hissed the curator. "Make for the canoe, Nick, and get sail on her. We'll come along with Dwight, somehow!"

Nicky darted off into the jungle to their left, while Sadok and the curator hoisted Dwight to his feet and started off along the rocky side of the mountain. They saw a party of the pygmies scuttling along in the

THE PISTOLS BARKED IN UNISON WITH THE HIGH-PITCHED YELL THAT THE MAN
LET OUT



IN DARKEST NEW GUINEA

valley below to get ahead of them. Stopping an instant to aim, the curator drove another shell down on them. Its detonation was followed by a sudden silence, and then out of the green depths of the jungle across the creek burst a full, deep-throated war chant.

“Ko! Ko! Ko!
Hy-yah! Hy-yah! Hy-yah!
To-yah-hyah! To-yah-hyah!
Ko! Ko! Ko!”

The curator stopped, exulting. These were *men!*—not the little, dwarfed aborigines of the hills, but big, tall, deep-chested men—the Outanatas!

He scarce dared to hope. An arrow whispered through the jungle over his shoulder, but he heeded it not, his eyes fixed on that open green tunnel that opened out on the creek bank. The marching song continued, and he got glimpses of spears and white-scrolled shields moving along through the greens of the forest below. Then a tall chief stood in the mouth of the tunnel, his face hideously streaked with white marks, and, hanging like an apron from his girdle, was the curator’s flaming red bandanna. It was the war chief of the Outanatas—and behind

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him came Baderoon, pointing and urging them on vigorously!

The curator cupped his hands.

“Baderoon! Baderoon! Here we are!” he yelled. Then he and Sadok laid Dwight down under a rock ledge and sought ambushes. Yells and war cries sounded from the mountain side all about them as the long line of Outanata warriors splashed across the creek, brandishing their weapons. Parties of pygmies formed for the assault in the swales. The occasional cough of Sadok’s sumpitan at different places on the mountain showed that he was outlying and picking off men here and there.

Then a knot of the pygmies gathered below the curator, evidently bent on taking the Outanatas in the rear. He aimed carefully into the midst of them and fired his third shell. Its stunning report was the signal for a general attack, for the Outanatas dashed out into the grass country, a cloud of arrows preceding them, while javelins soared and poised in the air, to sink out of sight in the long grass.

Baderoon came running up the hill through the jungle.

“Me get’m! Me fetch’m, *Orang-kaya!*

IN DARKEST NEW GUINEA

Come! No good for white man be here." He was fully armed, and exuberant with delight and high spirits. The curator called in Sadok, and they raised Dwight to his feet and set off at full speed, with the Dyak covering their retreat. The boy was fast getting his strength back now, and they went along rapidly. As they left the plateau the curator looked back. The whole country behind him was full of tall and short black men, fighting like demons, catching arrows on ready shields, jabbing at each other with long spears, and occasionally the white flash of a bamboo knife would tell where one of a pair had come off victorious.

That was his last glimpse of Papuan and pygmy, for the way led down abruptly into their valley, and soon they were crossing the strip of deep jungle and had arrived on the coral bank. A shout for Nicky, answered by a low whistle, brought them to the stream bank, where the old white sail of the small proa showed up through the thickets. Nicky had already gotten the crate aboard and was all ready to shove off. They tumbled in, and Baderoon took the helm, while Sadok drew in the sheet rope. The creek banks slid swiftly by, and presently they were out

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in the lagoon and headed down it toward the capes of the open sea.

"Good-by, New Guinea!" shouted the curator, waving his hand at the column of smoke that rose far back in the hills. "Some day the white race will need you—but it's a long, long way off yet, boys!" he laughed, dropping his voice. "And now let's have those cinnabar specimens," he added, as the proa swept along like a swallow under the fresh breeze. "Mum's the word about them, everybody," he warned. "It's the one big secret of the expedition."

"I suppose we'll see you next as president of the New Guinea Mining Company, Limited, Mr. Baldwin?" laughed Nicky, who was busily whittling at a short bamboo stick he had brought aboard.

"That opens up a big subject, boys," answered the curator, seriously. "If either of you want a big position in such a company, just say the word and it's yours. You'll be rich and prosperous beyond your dreams."

"And you, Mr. Baldwin?" inquired Dwight, curiously.

"Such temptations are not for me," replied the curator. "When I've reported this thing to certain financiers, I'm through. My whole

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life has been that of a scientist, a seeker after knowledge. When I have found a new thing my interest in it ceases. As a wanderer and an explorer I am happy; as a wealthy mine owner I'd be miserable. All my education has been in the service of science; it's the only life for me."

"Me, too!" grunted Nicky, splitting his bamboo wand and sticking a small sliver in it to hold it open. "And, there's one specimen from New Guinea that I *didn't* get, and that's a sea snake. You can have your mine for all of me!"

"By George! that's the way I feel, too!" exclaimed Dwight. "The engineers and the moneyed men can have Red Mountain, for all I care. I'd far rather collect a new butterfly in some out-of-the-way hole than own a million dollars. All I want is to be with you on your next expedition, Mr. Baldwin."

The curator looked into their eyes understandingly.

"It's the way we naturalists all feel," he said, appreciatively. "Enough to live on and the chance to do something for science is happiness to us. Sadok and I are going into the interior of Borneo next, and I'd be

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delighted to have you with me. Your characters are pretty well formed now; all this that we've gone through has simply hardened them, so I know I can depend on you—and that's the most precious knowledge any man can have—”

“*There's one! Port your helm, Baderoon!*” came from Nicky. They looked around, to see a sea snake swimming carelessly along, his head a foot out of the water. He was afraid of nothing and stuck out his tongue warningly as the proa sheered toward him. Then his oarlike tail flashed into swift motion and he shot along by their gunwale, but Nicky was too quick for him, and with a swift jab of his wand brought him aboard, squirming and striking furiously from the cleft in which he was caught.

“Look out! He's highly venomous!” warned Nicky, coming aft. “Watch out—he's getting away!”

The snake dropped to the bottom of the canoe and darted up its side. With a swift clip of the rod Nicky broke his neck, and the “specimen” lay squirming aimlessly in the bottom of the boat as they all watched it narrowly.

“He'll be ready for skinning out presently,”

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chirped Nicky, cheerily. "As a snakist I've got you fellows backed into the cellar!"

The proa had now run down opposite the capes, and the swell of the open sea slid her about like an airplane. That mountainous coast is always windy and stormy, and it was making the usual squally weather now. The proa bucked and plunged like a race-horse, her lee outrigger buried in foam, the weather one clipping the tops of combers, while the three whites sat out on the bamboo wings that hung out from each side on the outrigger braces like a basket. It was a wild and exceedingly wet ride, the proa careening down the wave slopes like a hawk and soaring almost bodily out of water when lifted up on the white-capped combers.

The land dropped swiftly astern; towering up into heavy banks of clouds rose the dark ranges of the Charles Louis Mountains, with the woolly pyramids of the afternoon thunderheads gathering in the sky back over the interior. It was their last look at Dutch New Guinea, for soon the cloud banks lowered and ugly squall clouds, like long dark cigars, swept across the horizon, shutting them in in the gray circle of the sea. A chip thrown over the side and timed by the curator's watch

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showed a speed of nearly ten knots. At that rate they would reach Aru at night—a land-fall that would be dangerous in the extreme until the stars came out and the sea went down.

Accordingly, the curator shortened sail, reefing the lateen down to half its original bulk. The proa now labored and wallowed, keeping at least one of them bailing vigorously. She was an able boat in the eyes of her original owners, no doubt; but then water, more or less, was nothing in their naked philosophy!

Then came the rain, beating the sea flat and drenching them to the skin. Through the smother of it the proa drove on steadily, laying her course for Aru as close as possible on the starboard tack. Later fell a flat calm and the stars came out. She rolled incredibly in the smooth, welling billows, but gradually these went down, until by midnight all was quiet and they lay drifting idly on the black bosom of the Banda Sea. Now and then the phosphorescent wake of a large shark would pass them, but finally this interest, too, waned, and everyone fell asleep except the curator, who had volunteered to take the watch.

IN DARKEST NEW GUINEA

He sat dreaming under the stars, the sail hanging out idly and scarcely straightening the sheet. A gentle gurgle of phosphorescent fire eddied from the captured Papuan paddle that they had used for a rudder. The dim forms of his companions lay huddled in the dark, lying on the bamboo framework over the outrigger poles.

The curator regarded them with feelings of quiet satisfaction. Their dash into Dutch New Guinea had been a success. They had brought back an immensely valuable natural-history collection, and mineral information to the world that would soon add a vigorous trade settlement to those two forlorn Dutch military posts, six hundred miles apart, on a wild and savage coast. But above all he rejoiced in the spiritual results of the expedition with deepest pride. Those two boys had shown courage and resourcefulness far beyond their years; they had faced privation, danger, and battle with a grit and determination, a cheerfulness and lack of grouch, that had proved them men after his own heart. And to serve the cause of science they had refused the opportunity for fabulous wealth and all the ease and comfort that money can give. With them and his two devoted natives

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the curator felt that he had a scientific organization that would do. Yes, it would do mighty well!

He smoked on, thinking silently as the hours slipped by. Finally a light breeze, the precursor of dawn, sprang up, and the proa slipped quietly along, little rills of water trickling against her planks. It grew light in the east, and after a time out of the mists in the west developed the solid cloud banks, pierced with pale outlines of islets, hill, and jungle, of the shore line of Aru.

“Land ho!” yelled the curator, waking them all up. “Here’s Aru, boys, dead ahead, and we’ve beaten our proa that was to have come for us by two days!”

THE END

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